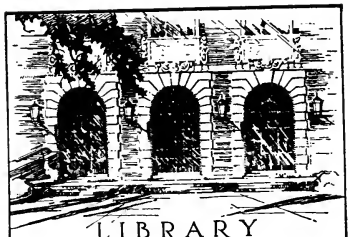
Poor Nellie



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POOR NELLIE

POOR NELLIE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
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PART I.

POOR NELLIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE Dowager Lady Rockhurst was well known in her day as a perfect woman of the world. She had seven daughters, and had intended making seven good matches for them; but whilst she was plunged in the intricate diplomacy of brilliantly marrying the second in town, her third daughter, Elizabeth, whom she had left in the country, fell in love with the Rev. Octavius Lawlor, the handsome clever curate of Castleview. This happened quite by accident, and much to Elizabeth's own surprise, as she had always intended making the best match of the family.

"A poor curate," said Lady Rockhurst; "an eighth son, and only £2000 to his fortune! And Elizabeth won't have more than three thousand, for there are so many younger children. And I had always thought Elizabeth as sensibly unromantic as I am myself!

Mr Lawlor is a man of family, or, notwithstanding his cloth, I should have made my footman turn him out of doors. He is a gentleman and is intellectually clever, so I can trust Elizabeth to make a bishop of him some day; but in the meantime they will have next to nothing to live upon. However, as Elizabeth is no great beauty, if she is determined to do a nasty romantic thing, let her do it quietly. There shall be no persecution. My son shall certainly give Mr Lawlor the living of Yellowmead when old Mr Croft dies; it is worth exactly £500 a-year. When Elizabeth has been married a twelvemonth, she can be trusted to give her younger sisters the very best advice. There is no way of developing a fine natural capacity for worldly wisdom like making a thoroughly unworldly match early in life. It opens your eyes quickly and forces you to understand the immeasurable value of money, a title, fine places and houses, and men-servants and lady's-maids."

When Elizabeth was married and finally settled in Yellowmead Rectory with her husband and child, Lady Rockhurst considered her decidedly a good companion for her sisters at those rare times when it was convenient to invite her and Octavius and little Clara to Castleview. Octavius was always invited, but the invitation generally came when it was impossible for him to leave his parish. Lady Rockhurst only considered her own convenience, and naturally did not think of his.

Fond as Elizabeth ever was of her husband, she

preferred leaving him at home and only taking little Clara with her to Castleview. Lady Rockhurst took much notice in her own dignified way of the pretty little grandchild, who was a very, very white, fair-haired wax doll, of singularly sedate behaviour—a curiously quiet, unemotional infant from birth, apparently untroubled by the lively feelings and passions of ordinary childhood. Lady Rockhurst was almost pleased with little Clara, and was once heard to say, "I think Clara is not unlike what I must have been at her age."

The Dowager Lady Rockhurst had other grandchildren: they were in mortal terror of her—Clara alone was without fear. The virtue of Clara's good conduct was certainly enhanced by her excellence in being an only child. When praising her good behaviour, Lady Rockhurst never failed to add, "And I always thought Elizabeth would have at least twelve children." It was Clara's fate in life often to get credit for exemplary behaviour in which she had no real part. From her cradle she had the knack of wearing what was admirable in her surroundings, like a pretty frock quite her own.

When the Bishop of Ruxborough stayed at Castleview with little Clara in the house, he made a small fuss about her, for she was just the sort of delicate-looking white child that a kindly old Bishop would think a little angel on earth. Clara was entirely without shyness, and repeated hymns to the Bishop very prettily.

Lady Rockhurst generally managed to have the Bishop of Ruxborough when Elizabeth came to Castleview, and this was the real reason Mrs Lawlor could not help feeling it was just as well Octavius should be obliged to stay at Yellowmead. Octavius was worse than useless under the same roof with the Bishop. He could not pay court to anybody.

Elizabeth did not mean Octavius to be always a mere parish rector, for she knew he was clever, and often said, "I never would have married a poor clergyman who was simply good and handsome, for I am quite aware a man must have brains if he has not money."

As the Dowager had foreseen, Elizabeth meant Octavius to be a bishop some day.

But whilst the Honble. Mrs Lawlor was awaiting the bishopric, she made up her mind to begin with a canonry in Ruxborough Close. Now it so happened that the Bishop of Ruxborough was first cousin to the then Prime Minister's wife: this lady took his advice, and the Prime Minister took hers, on many little matters of Church preferment. Those were the good old times, and very different from these. It was well known in the diocese that the Bishop of Ruxborough was virtually allowed to appoint the canons of his own cathedral.

In the year 18—, the aged Canon Beverly lay dying in Ruxborough Close. He was eighty; yet he took six months to die. Lady Rockhurst seemed to think such lengthy dying quite a liberty on the poor

old man's part, and indeed it put her to the inconvenience of making room for the Bishop and for Elizabeth and little Clara twice over in the course of those six months. Elizabeth made no secret of her desire to live part of every year in Ruxborough Close. It was more to her taste to gain her end by open audacity than by underhand intrigue.

Canon Beverly died at last. And in due time the Rev. Octavius Lawlor was appointed to the vacant stall in Ruxborough Cathedral. Never, never was there a clergyman so astonished at his own preferment!

"What have I done that I should be made a canon?" he said.

"Your sermons are good, Octavius," replied his wife.

"But who has heard them except the farmers hereabout, and Thomas Newsham, whose absent mind never really listens to anything?"

"All the same, Octavius, you are a canon. And now you must show the world the appointment is a good one. You must write a book."

"A book, my dear——!"

"You are far too modest, Octavius—far too modest. You don't know your own powers, but I do. You must write a book about St Paul."

"St Paul?"

"Yes; St Paul is your strong point. A few new readings in any one epistle will be quite sufficient for a mere canonry."

Elizabeth was delighted with her canonry, and would not have exchanged it just then for any deanery in the Church, because you could be a canon of Ruxborough and hold the living of Yellowmead at the same time. Elizabeth had determined not to leave Yellowmead till she had married Clara to the squire of the parish, Thomas Newsham, owner of that extremely handsome old place Eastcourt, and a man of large property as well. Elizabeth intended to marry Clara at sixteen. She was confident of success, because Thomas Newsham had providentially lost his mother.

The late Mrs Newsham had always said her excellent Thomas was a man to be married and not to marry. And she had taken good care not to let any one attempt to marry him until he was thirty. She had then provided a very suitable engagement for him with young Lady Fanny Devereux; but Lady Fanny had jilted Thomas—who really was the best of men—and thrown him over for a racing, betting, lively good-for-nothing about town, excusing herself by saying Eastcourt was a dull place, and Thomas so provokingly taken up in a misty sort of way with uninteresting fads and good works of a tiresome sort, that if she were married to him she knew she would run away from him, and so thought she had better run away before the wedding and not after it. Poor Thomas had never even suspected he bored the lively Lady Fanny, but Thomas's absent eyes and mind were singularly blind. So the shock was a very great

one. It was said in Nossex that it had made a shy man of Mr Newsham, and certainly, after his mother's death no one in the county saw anything of Thomas except the Lawlors who lived at his gate. His only sister, Kate Crofton, happened to be in India with her husband at the time.

Perhaps, in reality, it was merely that Thomas forgot to go and see his county neighbours. He was curiously forgetful. But it was impossible for him to forget Mrs Lawlor, as he was perpetually seeing her; and he did not dislike meeting her, because she always talked for him, and was not put out if he paid no attention to her conversation.

He also, after his own hazy fashion, had a real affection for the Canon. They were both truly good, unworldly, simple-hearted men; yet intellectually they were very different. The Canon was extremely clever; but there is really no knowing if Thomas were clever or not. Perhaps he might have been clever if his own mind had clearly belonged to himself; but the bits of it were rarely in one place, for they had a way of straying loosely about the world, and whatever bits there might be at home, would be fixed on some engrossing fad. Thomas always had some fad on hand.

Elizabeth was clever at inventing entertaining fads for Thomas, and good works which could be performed under her own eye, while Clara was rapidly approaching sixteen. It would not be politic, she felt, to let Mr Newsham fall into the hands of other good people

with intentions of their own. Now no one could suspect her of any intentions, when Clara was still so very small, and looked such a mere child in her short petticoats—really not more than eleven or twelve years old! When asked Clara's age, Mrs Lawlor would frequently say a year or two younger than she was, and if corrected, would exclaim quite naturally, "Is it possible? But now really you are right! How time passes! Yet Clara is quite a child still, and will be a child till she is twenty."

"It might, perhaps, be well to wait till Clara is seventeen, as Mr Newsham is so very much older than herself," thought Elizabeth. "But it would not be safe. I had better do it at sixteen, for who knows what may happen while we are in residence at Ruxborough. I was frightened two years ago, and terrified last year. Those underbred people round Slumby are dreadfully forward when I am away, and poor dear Mr Newsham is not aware those Thompsons nearly caught him last summer."

So Clara was married to Thomas Newsham at sixteen, and Thomas was married to Clara. He was twenty years older than her. To the day of his death he never knew how he had got married, for he did not remember ever having proposed. But he considered himself the most fortunate man on earth, and tenderly loved the exquisitely fair little angel who had so kindly fallen in love with him. Clara was persuaded that she herself had fallen in love with Thomas, and the good Canon thought so too. Elizabeth found them all very

easy to manage. There were no romantic notions in her daughter's head.

Living at the gates of Eastcourt, Clara thought the fine old Elizabethan house and the large park and lake the grandest in England; and young as she was, the prospect of being mistress of so handsome a place was very pleasant to her. Thomas, too, was a nice kind man, still good-looking. She had no dislike of him, and was accustomed to dreamy men, for when the Canon was much occupied with St Paul he was forgetful and not interesting to talk to, unless you talked about the Epistle to the Romans, which Clara, though brought up in a rectory, thought a very dull subject.

The Honble. Mrs Lawlor was far from being without a sense of duty, and to do her justice, she would not have made up this match unless she felt sure Clara would be happy with Thomas. "Thomas has an affectionate heart, and wants some one to love in that big lonely house, and Clara will be quite satisfied with Thomas. It is not in her nature to love passionately; the love that is given her she takes calmly as her due. She is like me in many ways, but not in this; nor in this is she like her own father or mine; but she is very like my mother, who though loved by my father, never seemed even to suspect what love might mean, yet was a good wife. Social position, a fine place, and large estates made her happy, and they will make Clara happy too. All Thomas wants is a title, and that his wife will get him some day. Thomas has made good settlements on Clara; and so if, being much older, he

dies first, Clara won't break her heart for him, as I should break mine if Octavius died before me. What might not have suited me will quite suit Clara."

Elizabeth said all this to herself. She was not a hypocrite, and would have said it openly to the Canon, only experience had taught her it really was no use to talk what she called "common sense" to that "dear, good, simple soul Octavius." He never understood it; it only seemed to bewilder him.

The Dowager Lady Rockhurst was on her death-bed at the time of Clara's marriage. A fatal disease, suddenly developed, was taking her very rapidly away from Castleview—Castleview which had been left to her for life instead of to her eldest son! The Dowager was loath to leave this pleasant world for one in which she might not perhaps hold quite the same social position; though, indeed, she did seem to feel that her death could not possibly be like that of a common person in the eyes of Heaven, and that a lady of quality must hold a certain rank beyond the grave.

Lady Rockhurst marked her approval of Elizabeth's worldly wisdom in marrying Clara so young and so well by adding a codicil to her will which gave Mrs Lawlor £6000 instead of £3000 to her fortune.

If Elizabeth had had twelve children the Dowager would not have left her this money.

CHAPTER II.

"MAMMA," said Clara, when she had been married some little time, "dear Thomas is so kind to me that I feel just as if he were papa; and he says the same sort of good charitable things when he is not too absent to talk. I am sure it is very nice to be married to a really good man, only it is rather dull, because Thomas has taken up the temperance fad, and has thought it right to speak at all those meetings we have been going to; and he does not speak easily, for he is apt to forget what he is going to say, so he writes out what he calls notes beforehand, but I call them speeches, and he reads them to me in the evening. I think it would be much pleasanter if we had more people in the house. It was delightful at Castleview when we went there—much livelier than in grandmamma's time! but Thomas, unfortunately, thought poor dear Rockhurst had what he would call a wild set in the house, and he begged me not to have any of them at Eastcourt, and I thought perhaps I had better not, mamma, though I should have liked to ask them."

"Quite right, Clara—quite right! As you are so

very young, it would weaken your position in the county and the world as a good man's wife if it were thought you did not share your husband's views. The Newshams of Eastcourt have been so long settled in this county, that they and their views and their hobbies are things of importance here. But, Clara, you may have plenty of society if you only begin in the right way. Entice Thomas carefully into the world. Have the right sort of people for Thomas first; and then, if all goes well, you can end up with the Rockhurst set. They will be glad to have you or go to you at any time, my dear, now you are well married. You have married well, Clara, and that is the important point. Everything comes easy after that."

"But Thomas only likes dull people and dull things," sighed Clara.

"Then begin with an elderly philanthropist, my dear, a temperance enthusiast, or something of that sort, but let him be a man of family and position. He ought to be a benevolent peer. Don't on any account let Thomas get amongst second-rate people, or the nice ones won't come to you. Then you might have a bishop to meet the peer; or better still, Clara, have the Archbishop."

"But, mamma, do you think an archbishop would be pleasant to talk to? because I always think the old Bishop of Ruxborough talks as if he were preaching a sermon."

"Never mind, my dear; it is the right way, and the only way, to begin with Thomas. And, Clara, you can talk to the Archbishop about St Paul and your papa's

clever little book; it will be good for your father's prospects. If only read by the right people, St Paul would make him a dean."

"Well, mamma, I do think having the Archbishop would be livelier than only having Thomas reading out his speeches in the evening, and we should be obliged to ask a large party to meet his Grace. Then, too, it would be delightful if papa were made a dean. But"—and young Mrs Newsham hesitated—"but how can I ask the Archbishop when I don't know him?"

"My dear Clara," replied her mother, "Thomas has often said he would restore the tombs in the chancel of that old church on the hill. We will make him do it immediately, but we will insist on his consulting the Archbishop first."

"Do you suppose one of the tombs can have belonged to anybody connected with St Thomas-à-Becket? It would be lucky if it did, mamma."

"The Archbishop will know, Clara; and if he does not, he will be interested all the same."

"I might take Thomas up to Lambeth," mused Clara, "and make him call. And if he won't go," she added, "why, mamma, you and I can."

And, indeed, this is what finally happened. The Honble. Mrs Lawlor had brilliant powers of descriptive eloquence, and the Archbishop was easily interested in the restoration of the ancient tombs. His Grace knew Mr Newsham of Eastcourt by reputation —he was the one gentleman of large fortune who then supported the temperance cause in the arch-

diocese. His Grace accepted an invitation to Eastcourt with much pleasure.

"Octavius, my dear," said Mrs Lawlor, after calling at Lambeth, and before the Archbishop's visit to Eastcourt—"Octavius, my dear, I do not think the family prayers at Eastcourt as simple and Scriptural as they might be. I have taken notes of the eloquent prayers you have offered up from time to time in the schoolhouse, and of one you used when poor old Polly Parker died, and here they are. With a few more added, and these ones properly arranged and adapted for everyday use, they would make such a very nice present for you to give dear Thomas on his birthday. They need not be printed—there is not time; but write them out clearly, and I will make a cover for them, like one of your sermon covers, only a smart one of blue velvet."

The Archbishop's visit proved a success in more ways than one.

Clara invited all the nice people in and out of the county to whose houses she thought she would like to go in return. "For if they come here, whether he wishes it or not Thomas will have to go to them." Mr Newsham was so bewildered at finding his house invaded to the very attics, that he never knew who came and who did not.

Clara showed by her invitations that she had entirely grasped the possibilities of the situation. Mrs Lawlor was actually surprised, and exclaimed, "Clara, you are astonishing! But you were born a woman of the world—you have the instinct of the thing by

nature! and far, far more than I had at your age; yet you look like a white angel, Clara!"

This was the wonderful thing about Clara; she did look like a white angel, or a Madonna of fair holiness, especially at first sight and at a little distance. In nine cases out of ten, the first impression you get of a person is absolutely right; but the first impression Clara made on most people was the wrong one.

The Archbishop himself was struck by the spiritual beauty of Mrs Newsham, and in kindly complimenting Mr Newsham on the bride he had wisely chosen, his Grace spoke of her as having the "beauty of holiness." Hazy as Thomas is, these words were remembered by him for quite a long time. The "beauty of holiness" was exactly his own impression of his young wife's fair and coldly serene loveliness.

Her cold serenity of look, like her marble whiteness, was that of a statue untouched by the moving joys and sorrows of life, for it was only at rare times that any emotion tinged her pale cheek with colour. Her way was to grow paler, and not less pale, with emotion. There was nothing warm about Clara. Her light hair was cold in hue, and cast cold shadows on her brow and neck; it had no touch of golden warmth in its abundant tresses. Her grey-blue eyes were just a little cold in colour too, although there were times when they would seem to melt into their softened whites, as the azure of the sky melts into the summer haze; they would look, when sleeping thus wrapped in blue mystery, as if they might be

dreaming of heaven, with a soul attuned to all its harmonies. But there were other times when the sudden wakefulness of these eyes, come perhaps quite close to you, could startle you. Usually, they were veiled by their drooping eyelids. It was these very full, drooping eyelids which more especially gave Clara the Madonna look. The eyebrows and lashes were marked in tender brown—some thought they were not dark enough. But there was no want of character in Clara's countenance and look. Her head was perhaps a little large for the delicately cut features, the top and sides and back having marked development; yet it was a well-shaped head, and betokened power of intellect, and especially a strength of will which the thin, firmly closed lips did not belie. There was much character (I had almost said obstinacy) in that small, tightened, finely chiselled mouth. But who looks with critical eye at a very white, fair-haired woman in the heyday of her beauty? In youth she is the very emblem of innocent, heavenly simplicity, far more than if she were dark-haired and brown. Clara was slight of form, and of that height which makes a man feel his strength and size were given him for the protection of so fair and tender a creature; and tender she did look in youth to most men's eyes. This air of fair tenderness increased the resemblance her drooping eyelids gave her to one of Raphael's Madonnas. But she was a Madonna who had had the Dowager Lady Rockhurst for a grandmother.

It took a mother and a very remarkable grand-

mother to invent Clara; for, with all her talent—her genius, I may call it—Clara could not quite have invented herself. She was born with much hereditary worldliness already in her constitution.

When the Archbishop was at Eastcourt, Mrs Lawlor did not in the least intrude herself upon his notice—rather the contrary. She could trust Clara to mention St Paul, and to draw his Grace's attention to the family prayers, with a tact enhanced by the beauty of holiness.

At first the Canon avoided the Archbishop; but when his Grace singled out Mrs Newsham's father for special kindly notice, and quoted a new reading of a certain passage in the Epistle to the Romans, the single-minded Octavius, never suspecting any one had primed his Grace on the subject of St Paul, grew warm, and proved conclusively to the Archbishop that his new reading was wrong, and would bear an interpretation favourable to agnosticism. The Rev. Mr Lawlor was altogether so eloquent, so learned, so enthusiastically in earnest, that whilst he himself feared he had contradicted the Archbishop with a flatness amounting to rudeness, he had really impressed the good Archbishop strongly in his favour.

It was not the modest Canon, but Clara, who presented a nicely bound copy of 'A Few New Readings in the Epistles of St Paul' to the Archbishop; and it was to Clara that his Grace expressed the wish that her father's family prayers should be published, prefaced by a dedication to himself.

CHAPTER III.

Canon Lawlor never became a dean, but in due time he became a bishop.

And a very popular bishop he was, being a really pious, unworldly, clever man, with a wife who, in her own way, proved nearly as good a bishop as he. The Honble. Mrs Lawlor undoubtedly did become most popular in the diocese. The higher clergy liked her because she was quite a lady, and the lower clergy liked her for the same reason; and then she was hospitable and never unkindly. With all her worldly wisdom, there was a soft spot in Elizabeth's heart. Besides, Lord Rockhurst's daughter gave herself no airs, and, unlike some Episcopal ladies, could see a curate's wife as plainly as a dean's; and if she met the curate himself taking a holiday in town during the season, could recognise him there just as easily as in the country.

Mrs Lawlor was never supposed to interfere in Church affairs. As a fact, she was consulted by the Bishop on all difficult matters, and invariably gave him excellent advice, advocating compromise in a

pleasant manner. She was neither "High" nor "Low"; she held that extreme views were a mistake in a bishop. Once or twice, when her Right Reverend husband's strong religious enthusiasm seemed to be carrying him rather far, the calm moderation of her views saved him from trouble. The Bishop never regretted following her advice; she was cleverly clear-sighted, and of admirable tact. During her lifetime nobody recognised her as a power in the diocese, simply because the moderation of common-sense is not easily traced to a woman's mind.

When Elizabeth attained the summit of her ambition she ceased to be restless. "I have made Octavius a bishop, and I am satisfied. I will not think of Lambeth." Moderation was strangely joined to dash in the character of this remarkable woman.

The quiet enjoyment of her bishopric softened Elizabeth, and she was more popular as an elderly lady than she had been as a young one. She was a kind, indulgent grandmother to Clara's many children, and they were fonder of her than of their own mother.

Elizabeth had one great advantage over her daughter; she had married for love, and true love improves every woman's heart. When Mrs Lawlor had intrigued, she had done so for a man she loved and believed to be good, and not for herself alone.

Now, when Clara laid down far-stretching plans, like the lines of an underground railway, it was not poor dear Thomas she cared to make a peer, but for herself that she desired a coronet. Clara never loved

the kind, good, absent man she had married in early youth. Perhaps her mother was right, and she was not made really to love any one; for though she showed much imagination of the practical sort in the clever contrivance of her underground lines, she never seemed to have that other more spiritual kind of imagination which craves to idealise some human being.

After her own fashion, Clara was quite happy in her marriage, and, like her grandmother, Lady Rockhurst, made a good wife. She was much admired for her pale, fair beauty; yet, to her honour be it said, she never flirted with any nobleman or gentleman or useful dully more than was just necessary to make a friend of him in her progress towards the peerage.

That quite, quite charming Mrs Newsham of Eastcourt was invariably spoken of as a model, ideal sort of mother, and especially by Clara herself, for she had a prettily tender way of doing the ideal mother, generally when she was out in society and her children were not by. But it must be allowed, the children showed to great advantage on state occasions. They had good manners, and were kept in admirable order. Clara would have the best nurses and governesses; and the children were always well dressed. The six girls were exceedingly pretty; the eldest boy very handsome, and the younger one not bad-looking.

Yet, admirable as Clara undoubtedly was in the outward, visible maternal aspect, the divine passion of the true mother's love found but little place in her heart. You are thought a cynic if you seem to doubt

that upon every woman who is a mother a sort of holy spirit does not come down direct from heaven. On many, many souls, and rugged ones, it does descend, and sometimes, like a solitary star amidst the clouds, will shine where all else is coldly dark; but it is a beautiful delusion, most untrue, to think the divine passion comes to all. Less rare than other kinds of pure unselfishness, it still is rare.

However, it was not any distaste for the society of her children which made Clara see so little of them when they were young. She merely could not be bothered with them, because she was too much occupied in managing Thomas and Thomas's affairs to the best advantage.

But you would be doing her clear-sighted mind the grossest injustice if you imagined she did not begin, at the very, very earliest opportunity, to think of her children's worldly prospects. Her eldest daughter, Adela, was barely thirteen when a certain idea first entered the mother's head.

"Sir Cuthbert Crofton is ill. If the illness should prove to be what one of the doctors thinks it is, George Crofton would be decidedly a good match for Adela. I will sound his stepmother on the subject."

So Clara invited her sister-in-law, Kate Crofton, to come and spend some time at Eastcourt. George was invited too, and kindly enough, but only in the postscript. It was dear Kate who was made to feel she would be really welcome.

Kate was pleased, yet certainly surprised, to find

Clara so hospitable. She had never felt happy or at home in her house before, though Thomas was always intensely kind to his only sister. But a brother's house is really a sister-in-law's. It was Clara's presence you felt at Eastcourt, Clara's power. You seemed to meet her at every turn, and it was in her house, not in Thomas's, you dreaded staying too long.

Kate felt more at ease with Clara during this visit than she had ever done in her life; she almost felt really at ease till quite, quite at the end of her visit, when a curious change suddenly came over her sister-in-law. All of an instant Mrs Newsham turned mysteriously severe. Clara could be very severe in a quiet, coldly silent way, and at such times not only every child, but every grown person in the house, would instinctively be cowed before her; and even Thomas, who never noticed anything, would seem to feel uncomfortable, though certainly without clearly knowing that he was so.

Clara appeared to give no orders; but all was altered in the twinkling of an eye, as if the grand Inquisitor of ancient Spain had come in the night. George, who had spent half his time in the schoolroom, found the door locked against him. The children had run more or less loose for the last fortnight; now they were kept strictly at lessons from morning till night. George could not for the life of him imagine what had occurred, hard as he tried to hit on some explanation. The Newsham children were just as much in the dark as he, but they accepted the

mystery in fear and trembling: they never dared to try and understand their mother; for, rightly or wrongly, it was to her they attributed all that happened—they felt her instinctively in everything. To George's perplexed astonishment, without having been knowingly naughty, they all seemed to feel in disgrace—and particluarly Adela.

When the schoolroom door opened for a short hour, Adela no longer rushed off to play lawn-tennis, but let herself be marshalled out by Miss Smith, the governess, for a staid and proper walk, much like a convict with her warder.

"What has happened, Adela?" cried George, running up to her.

"Nothing has happened, Mr Crofton," said the governess, who had called him "George" until then; "nothing has happened, Mr Crofton. Adela is merely taking a walk with me." As to Adela herself, she did not even dare to speak.

The discomfort and the awkwardness of the mystery were unbearable. George began to feel as if he had been convicted of crime; so did Kate. They both settled to leave Eastcourt immediately. And they went and packed up their things, giving some excuse for instant departure.

George was secretly much afraid of Mrs Newsham. But as he was going away, he managed to summon just enough courage to say to her, "Why has that Miss Smith suddenly turned into an awful dragon? And I say, Mrs Newsham, do you know, Adela has

got queer too; what on earth is the matter with her?"

Clara raised her drooping eyelids, and, coming near to George, fixed upon him that penetrating glance with which she can astound at close quarters those who have only seen her eyes veiled in their usual mystery. Poor George was confounded! Whatever had he done? for that look made him feel guilty.

Clara was silent; so was the bewildered George. When at last she did speak, it was in that tone of repressive severity she can command at will—a voice which startles you away from her very beauty, and makes you feel you can dread a fair, slight woman more than you ever feared a man.

"George," she said, "*I* cannot tell you what is the matter with Adela. But, upon reflection, I have come to the conclusion that it is my unpleasant duty to have a few words of explanation with your step-mother before she goes away. George, you do right to leave this house immediately."

To her sister-in-law Clara whispered, "One word, Kate, before you go; but it must be in private. I *must* speak to you alone. In here, in here!" And Clara took the alarmed Kate from a crowded hall filled with children, and nurses, and servants, and luggage, into her own boudoir close by, and there amazed her by saying in exactly the same voice which had shaken George's nervous system so uncomfortably, "I am very sorry, Kate, but I cannot ask George to come here again until he has sense and discretion.

He has lived in the schoolroom and has paid Adela marked, yes, marked attention."

"Adela!" gasped Kate Crofton; "Adela! Adela? Why, Adela is a child!—a child in short petticoats! And George a boy at school! George of all people! George, the least impressionable of human beings! My dear Clara!"

The idea was so preposterous, so out of all reason, that its ludicrousness overcame every other feeling in Kate's mind, and she burst out laughing. Clara felt disposed to be angry, and, as usual when put out, was coldly silent.

"Oh, Clara!" laughed Kate, "this extraordinary notion can't be yours. It must, it must be that ridiculous Miss Smith's. Half the governesses have their brains stuffed with nonsense; but this is insanity showing itself plainly where the history and the globes and the grammar should be."

Until this moment Clara had not thought of putting Miss Smith forward, but instantly the idea became a new manœuvre pleasing to her tactician's eye; so she then and there adopted the notion, making use of it just as far as appeared desirable. Quite recovering her disturbed temper, she said with a sweet sort of half-pitying smile, "Ah, poor Miss Smith! poor dear creature! Well, I do think, Kate, you may be right, and Miss Smith may have been a little over-anxious, and just a little foolish perhaps." As a fact, Miss Smith, poor dear creature, had never noticed anything, but had been inexpressibly amazed by

Torquemada's grand discovery. In snubbing George she had only obeyed Mrs Newsham's strict orders.

But Clara now came to the point, and said quite affectionately, "All the same, my dear Kate, I did think it was only right to give you a little word of kindly warning for fear of future complications, as George and Adela will not always be children. And I well know, my dear Kate"—the full eyelids were uplifted, and that near glance of Clara's searched Mrs Crofton's open mind—"I well know, my dear Kate, you would be quite as much against this match as I am. No fortune on either side, and only the vaguest, most improbable expectations."

"I am very glad you would be so much against it, Clara," replied Kate, with perfect, simple trust, and speaking now quite seriously. "And I shall never be offended if you do not ask George here again. And if you do ask him, I shall understand you are quite, quite sure there is no danger in having him and Adela together." Kate smiled a little,—"Not that I think there is any danger now, except in that curious Miss Smith's imagination." Then becoming grave once more, she said, "Thank you, Clara, for having warned me of the possible danger, because I know you can only mean to be kind. And as you truly say, George and Adela will not always be children. Thank you, Clara, especially for understanding the very, very delicate position in which I am placed." Kate had a sensitive delicacy of nature which made her blush as she added, "You know what Cuthbert

would certainly feel if George were to think of marrying young and without fortune, and above all, if he were to think of marrying Adela." The blush deepened—"Cuthbert would certainly feel I considered my stepson's prospects made him a good match for my niece. And George has no prospects—none!—if Cuthbert gets well and marries, as I sincerely hope he may, because he has been good,—oh! Clara, Clara, you cannot imagine how good and noble and generous he has been to George and to me since poor Henry lost his money in that bank and died, leaving us with nothing in this world but my small fortune. No widow, no fatherless child, ever had a kinder friend than we have had in Cuthbert."

This was too much for Clara's patience. "I declare you are quite ridiculous, Kate!" she exclaimed, irritably. "You immensely exaggerate what you owe Sir Cuthbert; and as to George, I really don't see that he owes him anything."

"George not owe Cuthbert anything!" cried Kate, aghast. "No one could owe his father more!"

At this moment the door opened, and George rushed excitedly in. The conversation had taken so entirely the wrong turn, that Clara was glad of the interruption.

"The carriage has been here this ever so long!" George called out, "and we shall be late for our train. Come, mother, come! Good-bye, Mrs Newsham," he added shortly, and literally dragged his stepmother out of the room.

Poor George was in an agony for fear they would

miss the train, and have to return to Eastcourt. He had been in a fever of discomfort in that mysterious house, and was so anxious to get away that he forgot to say good-bye to Adela, for she did not follow him like the rest of the children to the doorstep, but stood in the hall handcuffed, as it were, to Miss Smith.

Thanks to George's lively persecution of the coachman, the horses were driven so fast that the Croftons did catch their train.

"Awfully glad we've nicked it," said George. "What an awful sell it would have been if we had had to go back to Eastcourt—awful!" After a short silence, he continued, "I say, mother, do you think Mrs Newsham good-looking? Why, I heard a fellow the other day speak of her as if she were a beauty."

"And so she is, my dear George. She has the most beautiful white complexion I ever saw."

"Then I don't admire her one bit," said George, decidedly. "Awfully disagreeable way of looking through a fellow when she gets up close to him. Looks at you and shuts you up just like Snorter, my old form master. Awfully mysterious, too! Snorter was always mysterious when he meant to report you to old Swisher. I hate people a fellow can't understand. But I say, mother, Mrs Newsham looked as if she were blowing you up in that boudoir. Awful shame!" he cried, indignantly. "But what was she jawing about?"

"Oh, my dear, dear George, what language! what extraordinary language! But do not be angry, dear

boy; Clara was merely saying something a little unpleasant to me. She thought it right to say it, George, and she meant to be kind."

"I don't believe it," interrupted the boy, with much decision. "Just like Snorter, who always pretended to be kind when he slanged you most. What right has Mrs Newsham to slang you at all?"

"Oh, George, George! such curious expressions as you do use! And really, I can assure you, my dear, Clara did not scold me in the least."

"Looked awfully slangy, then. I'm sure she was in a wax!"

Kate Crofton hesitated. She did not want to put a certain notion into her young stepson's head, and yet she had grown very anxious to discover if there was any foundation, however slight, for Miss Smith's hallucination. After a moment's reflection, she said nervously, "Well, my dear George, perhaps you are a little right in thinking——"

"I know I am right, mother."

"Well, well, my dear, I daresay you are not altogether quite wrong. I do think Clara was a little —yes, a very little—not much, my dear George, but perhaps a little—annoyed."

"Annoyed? Bosh! She was in a regular wax! And it was something about Adela—tell me, what?"

The directness of the question flustered the timid Kate. "Oh, nothing, really nothing! that is, my dear George—I—I mean nothing in particular; only I think Clara thought — no! it was Miss Smith

thought. Yes; I forgot, George! it was Miss Smith thought——"

"Awful duffer that Miss Smith! But I say, mother, do be quick."

"I think, my dear boy, Miss Smith thought you—you played too much lawn-tennis with Adela."

"R. O. T!" exclaimed George, emphatically.

Kate let the inelegant expression pass without remark, for it gave her such relief that it was pleasanter to her ear than the purest Addisonian English.

"When Adela had been playing all day," she suggested, "I daresay Miss Smith found her tired and inattentive at her lessons, George."

"I am sure I did not want to play with Adela. I always played with Rockhurst till he and Tom were sent away to stay with their grandmother. Rockhurst and I were awfully well matched. It was Mrs Newsham, Mrs Newsham herself, who made me play with Adela. Adela is an awfully bad shot—awfully! I liked playing with Nellie best; but Mrs Newsham said Nellie was not to play, because she was not strong enough, though Nellie vowed that was all bosh. Adela is a shocking duffer! Catch me ever playing with her again! And I say, mother, if Adela does not take care she'll be just as queer as Mrs Newsham. She is beginning to get mysterious like her." And the lad repeated what he had said before—"I hate people a fellow can't understand!" adding this time, "By Jove, I do! I am awfully glad, mother, we've left Eastcourt. We'll never go there again. When

Mrs Newsham asks us, we'll always go somewhere else."

Kate Crofton was so perfectly, perfectly satisfied by the unmistakable sincerity of George's words and look and manner, that she never again troubled her head about Miss Smith's hallucination.

CHAPTER IV.

For excellent reasons of her own, Clara never mentioned to Mrs Lawlor the little idea which had entered her brain of a possible match between George and Adela, until more than two years after that sudden Grand Inquisitor's mystery at Eastcourt.

Elizabeth was staying with Clara—and as it happened, for the last time in her life—when her daughter said to her one day, "Do you know, mamma dear, that Adela was fifteen her last birthday. She will soon be sixteen; and I was married at sixteen."

"Clara, will Adela really have only £2000?" asked Mrs Lawlor, before making any further remark.

"She will have exactly £2500," replied Clara, decidedly. "Two thousand five hundred to the six girls makes £15,000. That will only give Tom £10,000 out of the £25,000 we intend to leave the younger children. We cannot charge the property more highly, because of the imperative necessity of making Rockhurst really an eldest son. This election, and all the local philanthropy, and that temperance fad of Thomas's, have cost large sums; and Thomas will

certainly not get a peerage unless it is known he can leave Rockhurst at least £15,000 a-year clear at his death. My jointure of £5000 a-year may not fall in till Rockhurst is quite an old man."

Clara had no intention of becoming a real angel sooner than was absolutely necessary.

"It is a pity you cannot leave the poor girls a little more," urged the grandmother. "Clara, leave them my £6000 and your father's £2000."

"That has been settled on me," answered Clara, very shortly. "I may want the ready money for other purposes."

This was said with dropped eyelids and a tightening of the small mouth—an expression of countenance Elizabeth well understood. She pressed the matter no more. When angry, Clara would generally be repressively silent.

The pause of uncomfortable silence between the mother and daughter was broken by Mrs Lawlor. "Well, my dear," she said, trying to speak pleasantly, "even with so little fortune, you will not have much trouble in marrying Adela. She is so pink and white, that some very young man of good prospects might easily be brought to fancy her. There will not be much difficulty with quite a young man—the trouble will be with his parents. An orphan of position and means is what you want, Clara; six desirable orphans for the six girls! But they will be hard to find!"

"Yet, mamma," answered Mrs Newsham, recovering her usually self-possessed temper, "when I married

I had no fortune whatever, and still I married Thomas very easily; and Thomas is rich, and has an extremely fine place, and is undoubtedly in love with me."

"Clara, Clara!" cried out the Bishop's wife, "you will ruin the girls' prospects if you start with the notion of finding a Thomas for each or any of them! Thomas was a most exceptional circumstance. I have never known another like him."

"But of whom shall I think for Adela?" asked Clara, as if she had never, never thought over the subject before. "Let me see; there's—there's James Howard."

"He'll never have a penny, Clara—never!"

"Then there's Frank Vincent."

"Not at all well off!"

"Ah! no, no, to be sure! I forgot that—I was only thinking how handsome Frank is. Victor Murray is not half as good-looking, but shall I try him?"

"Those Murrays are not a nice connection. I don't like one of them," said Elizabeth.

Now Clara had never even thought of Victor Murray before. He was not much of a catch. She did not really think of him now, and had merely mentioned him as she had done James Howard and Frank Vincent, because she wished to lead up to George Crofton quietly. She now said, "Ah yes, mamma! you are right. Those Murrays would not be a nice connection." And then she went on very gently, "But, mamma—mamma dear, what—what would you say to George Crofton?"

"George Crofton? Oh, Clara! do you really mean Kate's stepson George?"

"I do," said Clara firmly, her whole manner quite changing.

Elizabeth was taken aback. She understood by instinct this was no chance idea, but a well-considered plan. "Clara, Clara!" she exclaimed, "I implore you not to think of making up this match! Kate Crofton would intensely dislike it for her stepson—it would place him in a position of painful awkwardness with Sir Cuthbert, as it would certainly seem to Sir Cuthbert a match made up on the speculation of his death; and George is a mere boy still! Clara, it would not be right, and above all, it would not be honourable, to do this thing secretly against Kate's will; and if she clearly knew of it, she would not permit it. She is Thomas's only sister—you owe her some consideration as such. Thomas is very fond of her, and she is so fond of him, that for his sake she will trust you, and even if she has a misgiving, will put it far from her, and think it wrong to doubt you. And then for years Kate has been very good to you and to your children."

"My first duty is to think of my daughter's prospects, and not of my sister-in-law's sentimental over-delicacy," answered Clara, with a kind of soft doggedness peculiarly her own. The daughter had faith in her mother's worldliness, and so did not let the matter drop, but said, "Perhaps you are not aware, mamma, Sir Cuthbert is very seriously ill again. He will certainly not marry now, and George will have his

uncle's baronetcy and the fortune and Crofton Place."

"Sir Cuthbert may recover and marry! Yes, Clara, he may recover and marry!" cried Elizabeth, feeling this was a very strong argument.

"If I thought Sir Cuthbert would get well——" mused Clara, slowly.

"Settle on somebody else, my dear," urged Mrs Lawlor; "Adela will fall sufficiently in love with any one you choose. It would be different with Nellie. Let Nellie choose for herself. But you will have no trouble with Adela. Try Rupert Torrings—he will be really well-off; or, as Lord Marleigh is already caught, try the Harchesters' second boy who will have his mother's fortune."

"There are difficulties you do not understand," replied Clara shortly. "Lady Harchester is a suspicious scheming woman—a very scheming woman!" Mrs Newsham said this as if there was nothing on earth she disapproved of so much as scheming women. And it is quite true she did hate them; she liked simple, childlike people whom she could manage as easily as Thomas.

"Lady Harchester," continued Clara, "never seems to forget a stupid speech Thomas made about her model school the year after we were married. Besides, George will be a better match than either Rupert Torrings or the Honble. Fred, and he is much easier to get hold of. I shall be able to manage Kate perfectly," Clara said calmly; "she will never realise anything."

At this Mrs Lawlor was really indignant, and exclaimed warmly, "Poor Kate! I cannot bear the idea of your deceiving her! and you must deceive her, Clara, if you are to bring about this match."

Clara answered petulantly, "Things would be simpler if Thomas were any other sort of man, but he will never exert himself to find good matches for the girls, or to invite the right people." And then tenderly sighing, she added, "Ah dear! ah dear! I must leave the poor girls' prospects in the hands of Providence."

"Then you could not have a worse matchmaker!" called out Mrs Lawlor. With all her shortcomings, Elizabeth never canted, and heartily disliked cant in others. She resented, as a Bishop's wife should, having Providence mixed up with a purely worldly calculation. "Providence rarely makes the good matches with the good settlements," she said sharply. "Women of the world make them, Clara. Providence would give you a poor curate for a son-in-law, and no one of the girls is clever enough to marry a curate — she could not make a bishop of him as I did of her grandfather."

Clara was in no wise ruffled. "Quite true," she said; "none of my children are really clever. They are all like poor dear Thomas—except perhaps Tom. Tom is the least amiable of all my children. He and Eleanour are unamiable."

"That is cruel, Clara—cruel! You wrong dear Nellie! indeed you do! and poor Tom is not un-

amiable. All the children are amiable—all!" said the grandmother; "and they all have quiet tempers like you, Clara. You have a very quiet one; and yet, do you know, Clara, your children seem afraid of you. I can't conceive how you manage it! You never were afraid of me, and yet I am rather quick-tempered. No, my dear, you never were afraid of me!"

Elizabeth had tears in her eyes. "Ah, Clara, Clara!" she said, "with all your tender looks and ways, you never were so fond of me as I am of you! Nor will you ever be so fond of any child you have as I of you. Poor things!"

"You are ill, dear," said Clara composedly; "you are ill, dear, or you would not talk like that."

"Yes, I am ill; I know that I am very ill—I am dying. That is why I want you to love me more than you have ever done before. But I will lie down and rest now, for I am tired."

It was a strange sight for those who had known my lady bishop in the full vigour of her perpetual energy, and a pitiful one, to see her now lie still for hours overpowered by bodily weakness.

Clara was leaving the room when her mother lay down on the sofa, and so pale and worn and over-excited did Elizabeth look that Clara's heart smote her just a little, and, turning round, she went back and kissed her mother. Clara had a very pretty clinging way of embracing. Her manner could be more tender than her heart.

Mrs Lawlor did not stay much longer at Eastcourt.

Her illness increased alarmingly, and she wished to be at home with her husband.

Poor Elizabeth had only enjoyed her bishopric eight short years! How short they seemed! The same rapidly-fatal disease which had seized Lady Rockhurst long before the Dowager had any intention of dying, now seized poor Elizabeth, and, like a grim relentless executioner, dragged her suddenly face to face with all the torturing uncertainties of death.

"If I had been a curate's wife, it would now have been the same," she said. "Clara, if I had to live again, I would not be so worldly. But I am glad, now that I am dying, that at least I never was a hypocrite; I never said it was God, and not I, who made your father a bishop." Then again she said, "You look like a white angel, Clara: do not try to make people think you are one."

When feverish, she annoyed Mrs Newsham by repeating more than once, "Do not deceive people, Clara." Her last words to her daughter were, "Be loving to the children, Clara—be kind to Nellie; she will want your love."

To the Bishop, Elizabeth said, "Octavius, I die before you, and so am spared the greatest sorrow I could have had on earth; I am glad that I die first. But, Octavius, when I am dead, do not praise me on my tombstone or write a memoir of me making me all a bishop's wife should be. I have not been as unworldly or as really good as your kind, simple soul has thought me."

Elizabeth died sincerely. It is well to be sincere in death.

Now, had Clara died a bishop's wife with a whole diocese by her bedside, there is no doubt she would have died more beautifully than her mother.

CHAPTER V.

"Poor mamma!" thought Clara, when the first mourning was really quite over, and she had got Adela a very becoming light-grey dress; "poor, dear mamma! with all her talent, her very great talent, she certainly was wrong-headed about George and Adela."

Now this is what had happened. Sir Cuthbert Crofton's mysterious internal malady had taken a decided turn for the better about the time of Mrs Lawlor's death; so as soon as ever Clara decently could, she had invited Rupert Torrings to Eastcourt, though he was by no means an orphan. He was asked to come and stay "in the quietest manner possible." However, before long, Mrs Newsham was thoroughly disgusted with him. He never seemed to see that Adela was virtually grown up, and he actually told the young lady that he liked fair-haired girls best; and Adela was just such a white, white lily as her mother.

When Rupert Torrings went away, Clara much desired to ask the Honble. Fred to come also "in the quietest manner possible." You cannot have com-

pany in deep affliction, but you can always have an eligible young man. But Mrs Newsham could not get hold of the Honble. Fred. His mother, Lady Harchester, proved a wily sentinel quite on the alert. The truth is, Lady Harchester was one of those people about whom Clara had been perhaps just a little too clever. At the beginning of her career, before her great talents were fully developed, Mrs Newsham was at times undoubtedly rather too astute.

The Countess of Harchester was a cousin of the Lady Fanny Devereux who had jilted Mr Newsham. Clara, on her marriage, found a coolness existing between Eastcourt and Harchester House, and a decided disinclination on Thomas's part to go there or let her go. "Thomas is quite ridiculous; he avoids Lady Harchester," thought Clara; "yet no one can be more useful to us in London when I make Thomas take a house in town." Clara patronised all Lady Harchester's pet charities, and bought largely from her stall at the model-school bazaar. Clara did not take Thomas to this bazaar, but she said to Lady Harchester in her sweetest, most artless manner, "My husband is so interested in your model school, Lady Harchester, so very, very much interested! and he would like to study it in detail, and personally analyse its excellent management."

The coolness had been entirely on Mr Newsham's side. Lady Harchester was glad to fix an early day for the inspection of the school.

"Pray tell Mr Newsham, with my kindest regards,"

she said most graciously, "that I shall hope to meet him at the school on Tuesday morning, and myself do the honours of our new wing; and you must both come and lunch with me afterwards, Mrs Newsham."

When Clara got home, she praised the model school to Thomas. He had never heard of it before, but he was easily interested in any good work, and most works seemed good to him. In due time, Clara said—

"Lady Harchester knew you would be interested in her school, Thomas, so she has kindly asked you and me to meet her there on Tuesday morning, when she will herself show us over the new wing; and she has also asked us to luncheon. This is really very civil of Lady Harchester, considering how you have—well, my dear Thomas, do you know I had almost said, how you have cut her for the last few years? Now, now, Thomas," Clara exclaimed in her very prettiest little way—"now, my dear Thomas, you have, you know you have been a little, just a little tiny bit, rude to poor dear Lady Harchester. But bygones are bygones! so you must be particularly civil next Tuesday."

Thomas always meant to be kind and civil to everybody, but he was generally very absent-minded; and though he would often go to a place intending to make a polite speech to the lady of the house, when the right moment came he invariably forgot to do so. Clara naturally never expected him to say anything to Lady Harchester, nor would he have done so had Lady Harchester not been intimately connected in his

mind with his ill-fated engagement to Lady Fanny. The circumstances and people connected with the bewildering shock of being jilted stood out in curious relief to the usual dimness of Mr Newsham's mental haze. He recollected distinctly the last time he had seen Lady Harchester, and knew it was a long time ago; and when Clara told him he had been rude to her, he did not forget he had purposely avoided her.

So it came to pass that when Thomas went over the model school and met Lady Harchester again, his mind was unnaturally clear, and he remembered to make a little speech. He warmly praised the school, for his kind heart was ever sincerely pleased with any work intended for the help or reclamation of the young, and he said, "I am surprised that, living in the same county, I should never have heard of your model school, Lady Harchester. No! no! never! never until Clara gave me your invitation. It was kind of you, yes! yes! Lady Harchester, it was kind of you to wish to renew the acquaintance of past years, interrupted by . . . by what was at the time a . . . a tragedy—yes! yes! yes! a tragedy to me, but one in which I now fully recognise, as I should have done at first, that you had no part."

The naïve sincerity of this speech was as unmistakable as its genuine emotion. The angel of fair white beauty that Thomas Newsham had married, stood revealed to the astute Lady Harchester as a born little woman of the world, whose precocious talents would be fully developed by the time her daughters

were beginning to grow up. Being herself a woman of the world, Lady Harchester did not think much the worse of Clara, and when the two ladies met, the cordiality of her manner to Mrs Newsham, and of Mrs Newsham's to her, might easily have been mistaken for warm affection. Yet my lady was on her guard. She was always glad to let her girls go to Eastcourt. Rockhurst Newsham would be the best match in the county, after her own son, Lord Marleigh. But Lady Harchester managed to prevent, almost from infancy, Lord Marleigh, who would have the earldom, and the Honble. Fred, who was to have her fortune, from going to Eastcourt. Clara was not blind to the fact, that whereas the two elder boys were always "occupied with their tutor," or "going out fishing or riding with their father," the other children had no engagements.

It was in Mrs Newsham's nature to persevere where she was thwarted. But when Rupert Torrings proved a failure, and the undaunted Clara tried once more to angle for the Honble. Fred, she was forced, much against her will, to recognise that the provoking, stupid speech Thomas had made fully fifteen years before was still unforgotten, and stood an impassable barrier between the Harchesters' eligible second son and Adela. Owing to the cleverness of his mother, Lord Marleigh was already engaged to be married the day after he came of age. The county was decidedly annoyed at this premature engagement: there were but few good matches in Nossex.

So when Adela was quite sixteen, indeed just

seventeen, and had gone into second mourning, Clara calmly surveyed surrounding circumstances.

"Sir Cuthbert is worse again, certainly worse than he has ever been before. That Shropwich doctor must be right. If so, George Crofton will be a better match than any I could find in town, as Adela has virtually no fortune. I will try George first, and save the expenses of a season for another year. Then, if George fails, Thomas shall take a house in town whether he likes it or not. Now that I have got Thomas into Parliament, I have really carried this point."

Clara thought a little more: Von Moltke thinks much beforehand, and foresees the possibilities of a campaign.

"I must begin — yes, I must begin immediately, before George's prospects become visible to the world. What I said to Kate nearly four years ago, will be just enough to put her off her guard."

And then Clara once more exclaimed, "Poor, dear mamma! poor, dear mamma! she certainly was wrong-headed about George and Adela!"

When Mrs Newsham had suggested to her mother the idea of this match, she had not told her how she had already sufficiently prepared matters to make the boy and girl feel awkward together. This omission was highly characteristic of Clara. In consulting you, Clara will not unfrequently tell you half the truth; sometimes she will tell you three-quarters of the truth, but it is only on the very rarest of rare occasions that she tells you the whole truth.

It is always a little difficult consciously to manage

circumstances and force things to take place which never would take place naturally, and yet at the same time to make them all appear perfectly accidental. But Clara had a remarkable talent for this kind of diplomacy.

Admiral Crofton, Sir Cuthbert's uncle, had a small cottage and shrubbery, and a big flagstaff and semaphore, in that out-of-the-way little fishing village, Bluehaven. When on shore, the Admiral spent the summer vacation at Bluehaven, with his boy Charlie. The Admiral's young wife, much younger than himself, had died when Charlie was born. He had never married again, so Kate Crofton, his niece by marriage, used to come and keep house for him in the summer at the cottage, and bring her stepson, George, as a playmate for Charlie: the boys were about the same age.

As a rule, navy men in domestic life are either martinets to whom their home is a quarter-deck, or else they are the most amiable, affectionate, and simple-hearted of human beings. Such was that perfect gentleman, Admiral Crofton, the dearest, the nicest of all elderly men! and quite charming to look at! His hair had turned very white when he was comparatively young, so that you thought him older than he really was; but his figure was remarkably erect, and, unlike many naval officers, he was extremely tall. He had a bright, a very bright complexion, and the kindest blue eyes ever seen. It was a handsome face, with well-cut features—a high nose, a firm but sweet-

tempered mouth, and a marked chin. He was strong, and yet tender of nature; clever, yet guileless as a child; and delightfully good-tempered, though, it is true, there were a few subjects on which he was peppery: uncourteous manners, especially towards ladies, made him angry; and there were two or three nautical matters it was not quite safe to discuss with him. He had his own ideas about ironclads and the education of naval officers; and he fired up dangerously when told of the increase of the French navy.

It was keen sorrow to him that the prestige of England in the world is not what it used to be, and angry pain to him to feel that England is no more what England was.

"Whilst our people squabble in a public-house on shore, and our statesmen inflame the mean envies of classes, by God!" the Admiral would cry, "we impotently lose the kingdom of the world." The Admiral's love for England, his pride in her fame and in the glorious honour of that empire bequeathed to us by the genius of our greater forefathers, was not the cold abstraction, the apathy, that patriotism has become to most of us. It was a living passion within him, as warm, as real as the true love he had borne his wife and bore his only son.

The decay of patriotism in England is like the decay of an old man apathetically sinking into the grave, and ceasing, before he actually dies, to be a really living thing—so dim of sight, so indifferent to all interests but the draught about his own chair, so

dead of energy, so ruled by mean dependants does he become.

Strangers who heard the Admiral speak on this sore subject, and knew no more of him, thought him a violent-tempered man.

But as Clara's diplomacy had nothing to do with the prestige or policy of Great Britain, she had no fear of the Admiral, but looked upon him as a kind of tractable ba-lamb whom she could lead about with rose-coloured ribbons and hoodwink quite easily. She knew the Admiral and Charlie and George Crofton would certainly spend August and part of September at Bluehaven; but, before finally settling her accidents, she determined to make quite sure Sir Cuthbert was really so ill that Kate would be obliged to stay on and nurse him at Crofton Place. So Clara invited the Admiral to Eastcourt, and though not a hospitable person, was very hospitable to him. At convenient moments she cross-questioned him fully about Sir Cuthbert and Kate. You might cross-examine the Admiral for ever without his perceiving you were doing so. Dear, guileless creature! Clara was actually fond of him! and felt he suited her and her plans to perfection. Clara never likes people who do not fit quite easily and naturally into her numerous arrangements—in fact, she has a tendency to hate them.

When quite satisfied on the most important point at one side of the matter which she had at heart, Mrs Newsham turned her mind entirely to the other. She quickly foresaw a pretext for going to Bluehaven, and

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for taking Thomas and Adela there in the most natural way possible.

This was extremely clever, because Bluehaven was a most difficult place to go to by accident—being a sort of end-of-the-world that could lead nowhere. Then, also, Thomas hated leaving Eastcourt in the summer.

But Clara settled to go to Bluehaven from the best and highest of motives—solely to restore her poor, dear father's health!

A brilliant idea! And it was quite true the good Bishop was ill: he had never been well since the shock of his wife's death.

Clara discovered that what the poor, dear Bishop wanted was change of air—change of air and rest; and she said so to Dr Fozzle, who was the chief medical "opinion" in the diocese. Dr Fozzle agreed with her, but recommended a bracing inland air, like that of Eastcourt.

One of Clara's most remarkable characteristics is the power of persuasion she can exercise at will over most medical men. The old-fashioned family doctor purrs to her voice by instinct, like a soft-coated fatherly tom-cat. Half the spell lies in her look and in the tenderness of manner with which she will discuss the "case." Her suggestions to the medical faculty are so gently, so beautifully made, or rather insinuated, that the doctor will feel as if they were his own. Clara never contradicted a doctor: she always began by agreeing with him.

Yes; her dear father did want a bracing, a very

bracing air. Dr Fozzle was quite right: it was a really dry, bracing air the poor dear Bishop required. Clara perceived that Dr Fozzle understood the case admirably; and it was so very, very wise of him not to recommend a relaxing place,—a relaxing air had never, never agreed with the dear Bishop. Dr Fozzle was undoubtedly correct in considering inland to be generally more bracing than sea air. Mrs Newsham had never known but one exception to this rule. Yet she had known one; but Dr Fozzle could never, never have heard of Bluehaven. Nobody had ever heard of Bluehaven. It was *such* a dull, out-of-the-way place. But if only the great doctors knew of it, it would be *the* seaside place—the one only seaside place—they would send their patients to. Clara called the air "a breezy quinine, a nerve tonic, an ozone stimulant," and said it was so exceptionally dry and bracing that it was only people of exhausted nerve-power who could stand the climate long—persons in the state the poor dear Bishop was. Dr Fozzle was so very, very right, Clara was sure, so perfectly, so unmistakably right in thinking it was wear and tear of the nerve-tissues and exhaustion of nerve-power which ailed the Bishop.

Finally, it was Dr Fozzle—Dr Fozzle himself—who ordered the Bishop to Bluehaven.

Bluehaven is seven miles from a railway station, and such an insignificant place, that at first sight it seems to consist of Admiral Crofton's flagstaff and semaphore; you can see them miles off. When you come near, you perceive his tiny cottage and his patch

of shrubbery; and then in a cleft down below, nestling like a sea-bird on the rock by the side of the haven, are a little fishing village, rather a tumble-down church with a low tower, a poor sort of rectory, the surgeon-apothecary's house, about six trees, a very small pier, and nothing else.

Clara had first to get rid of the rector and his family; and this required no little diplomacy, for the rector decidedly wished to stay and preach to the Bishop, and he proposed the surgeon-apothecary should take a change of air. The surgery was a mile from the Admiral's cottage, while the rectory was quite near; its one field crept over the hill-top to the flag-staff and shrubbery, and touched the flint wall of the semaphore.

Though Clara was rich, she was not naturally open-handed; but she offered twelve guineas a-week for the rectory house, and the clergyman's wife forced her husband to accept the offer—pointing out to him also that he might go by train every Sunday, walk the fourteen miles, and perform the service and preach at Bluehaven. Clara did not mind seeing the rector once a-week; but she was particularly glad to be completely rid of his wife, as she thought this lady a gossip.

So the Bishop, being ordered by Dr Fozzle to Bluehaven, was very kindly taken there by Clara; and never was there a poor bishop squeezed into a smaller or more uncomfortable house! Luckily he was a most amiable Right Reverend, for now, really, there

was hardly room for his apron, and no place whatever for his chaplain!

Clara did not want the chaplain, as he might have flirted with Adela; and it was for Adela she had taken the rectory. She brought her second daughter Nellie there too, so as not to make Adela conspicuous—indeed she said it was Eleanour who required the sea-bathing, and thus made Adela seem an accidental circumstance—merely a companion for the sea-bathing Nellie.

To the Bishop, Clara said—"But now, really, dear papa, do you know it is as a special, particular pleasure for yourself that the two girls are here? as a quite especial pleasure for dear grandpapa!" How prettily Clara could say those kind of little things!

Thomas was also dragged to Bluehaven. "As to Thomas," thought Clara, "he will be useful in many ways, and he never sees anything. He will be with my father, and do as well as the chaplain; and he need not take up any room, for he will sit in the study with the Bishop. If Thomas wants to go home, I will make him give a temperance lecture to the fishermen. He is so slow in preparing a speech, that I can manage it shall occupy him the whole month." Clara had only taken the rectory for four weeks, having discovered in her preliminary cross-examination of the Admiral that George Crofton was to go up to a crammer in London on the 1st of September.

Sir Cuthbert had become very ill, and Kate Crofton was so engrossed nursing him, and so truly unhappy

about him, that she had neither heart nor leisure to be surprised at hearing Dr Fozzle had ordered the Bishop to Bluehaven; for that is what she did hear. It was even in the newspapers.

Clara wrote from the rectory to Kate: "How *very* unfortunate it is, my dearest Kate, that the *only* year we should *ever* have come to Bluehaven should be the one, *one* summer you are not here! My dear father can stay away from his diocese just a month! but, I fear, *no* longer! However, as the last accounts of poor dear Sir Cuthbert are *so* much more favourable"—they were really no better—"are *so* much more favourable, so *hopeful!* I may say, I certainly *do* expect to have the *great* pleasure of seeing you here before we leave! for you *must* come, my dear Kate—you *must* come while we are here! It would be *too* naughty if you did not! I am glad to say this air really does agree wonderfully with my father. Dr Fozzle was certainly right in sending him here, though it is *such* a dull place! But a gay place would not have suited the dear Bishop; he requires *complete* rest! And, as Dr Fozzle wisely said, in cases of nervous exhaustion it is most beneficial to be seven miles from a railway station, and to have but one post in twenty-four hours; so we do not complain!" There was a P.S. to the letter: "The sea-bathing agrees quite wonderfully with dear Nellie."

Kate would never have known Adela was at Bluehaven, only George happened to write one of the rare letters which a deep affection for his stepmother

squeezed out of him in the holidays; and in it he chanced to say: "It is an awful sell having Mrs Newsham here, but I keep out of her way as much as I can. I like Mr Newsham and the Bishop, and they don't make a fellow feel as if they were always looking through him. But Adela and Nellie are an awful nuisance, particularly Adela, and they take possession of the Dancer, and only go dodging about the bay, and Charlie and I have had no sea-fishing."

"Adela at Bluehaven! Adela! So Clara has actually taken Adela where she knows the girl must be all day long with George!" And the remembrance of Miss Smith's extraordinary notion flashed back across Kate's mind, and for an instant she was astonished; but the short surprise quickly melted into the thought—"I am glad of this: it shows Clara has quite got over that preposterous idea. After what Clara said to me, I know she would think it dishonourable to bring George and Adela together unless she was quite sure there was no risk. I recollect distinctly her saying she was against the match—yes, I do." And Kate looked back mechanically at Clara's letter. Her eye was caught by the words: "The last accounts of poor dear Sir Cuthbert are *so* much more favourable, so *hopeful!* I may say."

"Clara thinks he is better than he is, and will recover." Then, for a moment, a slight instinct of mistrust, like a summer cloud, overshadowed Kate's pure mind. The transitory feeling, which passed as quickly as it came, was painful. Though alone, Kate

reddened as we do when an ignoble thought has darkened our mind. "I am hard on Clara, and she is my only brother's wife. Dear Thomas loves her, so she must be as truthful and good as her fair beauty would make you think. I feel she does not warmly care for me, and I should like Thomas's wife to love me satisfactorily; and no doubt that is why I am unjust to Clara. I will not wrong her any more." And Kate turned from the passing suspicion, and afterwards forgot it. Sir Cuthbert would have no nurse but her, and she had no time to think. Then, too, it was a pleasure to Kate nobly to trust Thomas's wife.

CHAPTER VI.

If Adela was an "awful nuisance" to George at Bluehaven, George was an agonising discomfort to poor Adela. Torquemada's sudden mystery four years ago had never been clearly understood by Adela, but had been felt by her with all the perplexity of unconscious guilt. Miss Smith, without clearly telling her anything, had made her feel as if she had committed a crime.

It was from "mamma" she had discovered the horrid puzzle was connected with George. She never would have guessed it if left to her own slow imagination. Mamma had spoken to her, and what mamma had said sounded awful to the young girl's fluttering mind, partly from Clara's severely alarming manner, and partly because Adela, though only grasping a dim sort of instinct rather than meaning from her words, had yet been filled by them with a strange shyness and a curious kind of vague shame. She was barely thirteen at the time of the grand mystery, and had the unimpressionable, slowly developing nature you often see in a very blonde, stolidly placid girl. Nellie

was quite different: at thirteen she would have seized the idea Adela could not rightly grasp.

To do her justice, Clara had felt a little ashamed of putting notions into Adela's innocent young head; and so, when she had said to the child, "George has been paying you marked attention, and, Adela, you have dared to encourage him. I am very angry; I can never allow this thing," she had also made her little daughter promise never to mention these words or to speak of George to any one. And Adela had kept the promise through fear of her mother, and also because of the bewildering, awkward shame she felt in even mentioning George's name. She would blush if others mentioned it; and it was really this discomfort about George which had kept her from telling Nellie, as a dead secret, the curious thing mamma had said.

However, when one whole year passed and George did not come to Eastcourt, and a second long year went by slowly, as years do when we are young, and Adela did not meet him, and then a third year passed, Clara saw the girl was forgetting her awkwardness, and noticed she had even ceased to blush at the mention of George's name. At first the judicious mother made no remark, for she happened just then to be thinking of inviting Rupert Torrings to her house, and was trying to get hold of the Honble. Fred. But when she found Rupert Torrings only liked black-haired girls, and that Lady Harchester was a fortified stronghold protecting the Honble. Fred, while Sir Cuthbert Crofton's disease was so rapidly creating expecta-

tions for George that Dr Fozzle had to order the Bishop to that bracing place, Bluehaven, Clara considered the moment had come when it would be wise to make Adela feel awkward again.

So, before leaving Eastcourt, she had warned Adela to beware of George Crofton's attentions. This had revived the old discomfort, and thrown the poor girl into such a perplexity of shyness, that she had implored her mother with tears to let her stay at home.

"No, Adela; you *must* go to Bluehaven," Clara had said, in that voice of hers no child ever disobeyed. And Adela was still a child in nature and character, if not quite in years. "No, Adela; if you stayed away, George would think you had purposely avoided him. And when a young lady—you are grown up, quite grown up, Adela—when a young lady of your age avoids a young gentleman, he thinks . . . do you know what he thinks? . . . he thinks . . . she is in love with him!"

"Oh, mamma, how dreadful!" cried the young girl, in an agony of shame.

"You do well to blush, Adela; that is what George would think if you remained at Eastcourt. So I insist upon your coming to Bluehaven, and behaving perfectly naturally to him. Do you hear? Perfectly naturally. I shall watch you, Adela, and see you neither avoid nor encourage him. You must be natural, but you must also be distant in your manner to him now, because you are grown up. He is grown

up too." And Clara had again repeated, "Remember, Adela, I shall watch you!"

Stolidly unimaginative and placid as Adela was, the terrible feeling of being watched by "mamma" was nervous torture to her.

When she arrived at Bluehaven, she would have given all she possessed to have met George when mamma was not by; but mamma was by. The girl was always feeling Clara's presence now. She felt it intensely on meeting George for the first time, and she shook hands with her old playmate in a state of such painful, blushing trepidation, that he very naturally exclaimed, "I say, Adela, what's the matter? you look awfully queer." At this the unfortunate girl turned white, and thought she would faint; and the kind Admiral thought so too, and placed her on the sofa, brought her water, and made quite a fuss about her. From pallor she blushed into the deepest red.

"Adela is a little overtired. We had a very hot and dusty journey," said Clara calmly; but Adela only blushed the more, and George was suddenly made uncomfortable by feeling Mrs Newsham's near glance searching him.

Adela turned white again. She was thinking, "What will mamma say afterwards?" She was curiously afraid of that white angel her mother, and she trembled all over.

"Why, Mrs Newsham, the poor child has got the ague!" cried out the Admiral, who believed in the ague, and believed in no other disease, for it was his

own particular malady. "That's exactly the way an attack comes on. When I was off Vera Cruz, I was seized with the shakes all of a sudden. Just like this—shook from head to foot: never was more surprised in my life. Such piping hot weather, and there was I shivering! But I was cured in no time by some quinine pills I have kept about me ever since. I have some boxes of them now up at the Lookout." The Admiral called his cottage "The Lookout." "Nothing like taking one of those pills in time," he said to Adela, "so I will go up to the Lookout and send you one down by Charlie; take it immediately, my dear, and you will be quite well soon."

This is what Clara said to poor Adela afterwards: "Adela, did not I expressly tell you to be perfectly natural with George?" Adela began to cry.

"Stop crying this moment, Adela, and answer me. Did I not tell you to be natural with George?" But Adela really could not speak for sobbing. "How dare you disobey me, Adela? I told you to be perfectly natural with George, instead of which you were most remarkable, most extraordinary in your behaviour. You made a regular scene. I am shocked at you, Adela!—shocked! You have no dignity, no proper girlish sensitiveness of modesty, or you would have been ashamed to attract George's attention, and make him ask what was the matter with you. Your manner betrayed what a young lady should never, never betray! And I could see from George's look what idea it was crossed his mind."

At these words poor Adela felt as if she could die of shame. Clara saw she had made the right impression, so continued—"By letting George feel his presence has the power to unnerve you, you are provoking—yes, Adela, you are provoking attention on his part. You are asking him to pay you marked attention. Now listen to me"—Clara spoke in her most repressive tone of voice—"now listen to me. I am determined, firmly determined, you shall not encourage him, Adela. You must never play more than two games of lawn-tennis with him. You must refuse if he asks you to play a third, but without giving any reason. And if you go out boating with the Admiral, and George is there, you must not be taking George's hand and letting him help you in and out of the Dancer. You can climb up from the punt or walk along the gangboard by yourself. It is quite different for Eleanour; she may do as she likes, for she is not yet grown up, but you are old enough to be married. Now remember, Adela," were Clara's last words—"remember I shall know if you obey me or not, for I will keep my eye upon you; and though I shall not go out boating, as it makes me sea-sick, I will watch you through the spy-glass from the Admiral's semaphore."

If Adela had not been naturally phlegmatic, she would certainly have got a nervous fever. Notwithstanding the quinine pills, she looked really ill; so the Admiral insisted on her taking them for ten days. He himself had taken them for three weeks that

memorable time off Vera Cruz. But this kindly meant doctoring only made Adela worse, for the Admiral was always inquiring after her symptoms.

"Had she a recurrence of that trembling? Was she still constantly turning white and red, and feeling hot and cold?" And one day the Admiral asked these questions out boating, and George was sitting face to face with her.

Adela answered with such blushing cheeks and such a curious confusion of manner that both George and Charlie exclaimed, in one breath, through sheer astonishment, "I say, Adela, what a fool you are!"

Even Nellie, who hardly ever made a disagreeable remark, said, "Adela, you are queer! so queer ever since you came to Bluehaven! And it is all because mamma tells you you are grown up. I know it is! When I am grown up," she added, with a decision that was quite unusual to her,—"when I am grown up, I will be just what I am now. I won't change a bit. No, I won't."

"Nellie, you are a brick!" exclaimed Charlie, warmly. "I am sure you will never be a fool."

And though civil speeches were not in George's "line," he actually said, "You always had some sense, Nellie. Even that ridiculous Miss Smith could not make an ass of you." As he spoke he looked with the utmost contempt at poor Adela.

There was something in his look which made Clara's agitating words, "George will think you are in love

with him," rush upon her mind, and the young girl then and there burst into tears.

"Oh, poor Adela! poor Adela! I am afraid she is sea-sick," cried Nellie, sympathetically.

"R.O.T!" mumbled George, audibly.

"Land her this instant, father," said Charlie, firmly —he was a young fellow of strong character.

But tears—a woman's tears—were infinitely distressing to the kind Admiral's tender soul. He had not reproved the boys for that first exclamation of theirs, because, although he himself had not the heart to chide Adela, he could not help thinking it was no harm others should make her feel she was getting funnily self-conscious in her ways. "It must be affectation," he had thought, "for the child was quite natural at Eastcourt." Yet when tears were streaming down Adela's blushing cheeks, and were reddening her eyes and distorting her pretty face, the Admiral suddenly waxed indignant, and gave the boys a fine scolding; he was particularly severe upon George, because he had seen the contemptuous look of dislike the lad had given Adela.

George thought he was being unjustly "blown up," and got sulky and disagreeable, and wanted, rightly or wrongly, to go out beyond the bar sea-fishing in the rough water, and he muttered loud enough for the Admiral to hear, "Serve the girls right if they are sea-sick. Girls are a horrid bore in a boat."

The Admiral was incensed at such ungallantry. "Come, come, sir! no more of this, sir! You ought to

be ashamed of yourself, sir." When the Admiral said "sir," it was a sign he was really angry. "In my day a young man of eighteen—d——n it, sir, just nineteen—a man of nineteen was a gentleman, and had the manners of a gentleman towards ladies. We should have kicked him out of the service if he had behaved like a booby schoolboy."

From the instant the Dancer's head would be turned towards land, Adela's whole mind would be taken up thinking how she could best jump into the punt and ashore without a helping hand. So far she had contrived to do this successfully and without attracting attention.

But to-day the Admiral was on the alert. He was a man who always did what he considered his duty; and on this occasion he thought it his bounden duty to see the "youngsters" had good manners.

The Dancer wanted some little thing doing to her that required her to be run up for an hour or two on the sandy beach, instead of being left as usual at her moorings off the pier.

Charles Crofton handed Nellie down from the yacht like a perfect Lord Chesterfield.

"Now, sir," said the Admiral, turning to George—"now, sir, give your hand to Adela. Behave like a gentleman, sir. Help her out carefully, sir. Adela, give your hand to George."

The startled Adela was obeying mechanically, for the Admiral spoke sharply, and he was generally so mild, when, with her hand almost touching George's,

and her foot on the gunwale, she suddenly remembered that terrible spy-glass. She turned, drew back, looked up at the cliff above, caught sight of the semaphore, and in the flutter of the moment lost her footing, and slipped down between the yacht and gangboard. Fortunately the tide was not full in, and the Admiral had run the Dancer well up on the beach, so she was only wet to the waist. But if she had been drowned by George, the Admiral could hardly have been more indignant. He reprimanded his nephew as he would have done a midshipman who was a disgrace to her Majesty's navy. George made matters worse by angrily repeating that Adela was an awful duffer, and had fallen into the water because she was a fool. This was more than the Admiral could stand; he actually raised his right hand, in which he flourished a rope-end, exclaiming, "How dare you, sir? How dare you, sir?"

At this Adela, all dripping, rushed forward and caught his arm, and cried out, "George is right. It was my fault, not his. I would not take his hand. I would not . . . on purpose."

"On purpose!" stammered the astounded Admiral.

"Because," cried Adela—"because . . ." Good heavens! she had almost said, "Because of mamma; she is looking through the spy-glass." But she stopped short, glanced up nervously at the semaphore, seemed to feel that awful near presence of Clara, just as if her mother could hear as well as see her, and, blushing scarlet, and with infinite embarrassment, said instead, "Because I—I—I am now grown up!"

The Admiral reeled round in the intensity of his astonished amusement at Adela's words and ridiculous self-conscious look, like a shy highly proper white rat dripping in the water; and he laughed, and laughed as only an old tar or a young boy can. Charlie with Eleanour came running back to know what the Admiral was laughing at. Adela looked at him so piteously that he did not tell them then; but he laughed more and more, and George, forgetting his ill-humour, began to laugh to.

When George laughed—"He is laughing because he thinks I am in love with him!"—the draggled Adela wished she had really been drowned, so overpowered with shame and vexation did she feel, and she sprang from the waterside up the beach, and took to her heels and ran towards home as quickly as she could.

"I say, Adela has had a ducking," cried Charlie cheerily, almost as if he were pleased.

"And Adela hates even wetting her feet. And, oh dear! oh dear! she has got her light-grey dress on! What will mamma say?" exclaimed Nellie. "I think I had better run after her, Charlie," she whispered; "she will be so dreadfully afraid of mamma."

"You are horrid cowards! you all are!" said Charlie, scornfully; but he ran after Nellie, who was already off.

The Admiral found himself standing alone with George. He took his hand and shook it warmly. "My good fellow, I was hard on you. I am sorry I gave it to you so hotly, George, for the child is a precious

little fool. Ha! ha! ha! Such notions for a baby's head!"

Adela was so slim and tiny—she was shorter than Nellie—and had such a very youthful pink and white face, that the Admiral thought her much younger than she was, and never in the slightest degree realised she was just seventeen. She certainly had the look and manner, and to a great extent the mind, of fourteen.

CHAPTER VII.

THE horrid discomfort of George grew worse than ever to Adela after that unlucky ducking.

Notwithstanding the ruin of the light-grey dress, "mamma" insisted on her going out boating every day; while, if only the girl had been allowed to remain on shore, she would never have met George at all, because he did not come down to the rectory in the evening. The Admiral and Charlie came every night, but George stayed up at the Lookout, and declared that he was "sapping" for the new crammer. He was never to be seen in the morning, for he vowed lawn-tennis a bore, and disappeared all by himself till luncheon-time, and he lunched up at the Lookout. Oh, if only "mamma" would have let Adela stay at home and not go out boating!

The getting in and out of the Dancer was now even more painfully awkward than before the unlucky ducking. Charlie and Nellie were sure to laugh; so George must have told them everything. It was quite clear he had, for he always looked towards them when he said, "Now, Adela, the tide is full in. Come!

now is your time. Flop right down into the water, for you know you are grown up. By Jove, you do!"

And the Admiral—the Admiral, who was generally the kindest of men—would call out, "Clear the gangboard! Here comes Adela! Stand back, Charlie! Out of the way, George!—out of the way, sir, or we all know what will happen!" And the same sort of banter would confuse her again, as she climbed up the companion-ladder from the punt into the yacht; and Adela was sure that if she slipped then she would be drowned—and she had a horror of being drowned.

When you have tickled an old tar's fancy, it is not easy to make him forget the joke: it is rather as if he had been accustomed to take a joke, like his ship, round the world, and bring her back all spick and span to port again. The Admiral seemed to Adela to be always smiling now. She had no sense of the ridiculous herself, and took her young life very seriously. It was misery to her to look up and catch the Admiral's amused glance, and see his lively blue eyes twinkling with fun like a mischievous schoolboy's. Then Bluehaven was such a very, very dull place, that even a small joke was an event, and lasted longer there than elsewhere. There were jokes in the little village which had descended from father to son.

The Admiral believed implicitly in Clara. He thought her exactly what she looked, and took it for granted that any little story about "the children" must be delightfully interesting to such a sympathetic mother; so before long he confided to Clara the amus-

ing little joke about Adela. "And now, Mrs Newsham, take care! The child will soon be discovering how pretty she is, and we shall have her wondering if all the young fellows are in love with her. Ha! ha! ha!"

"For shame, Admiral! for shame!" said Clara; but she smiled with much self-possession, though she was really taken aback at his words.

"How Adela will blush when that day comes!" continued the amused old sailor. "Ha! ha!" And then he added, more seriously—for the ague was a serious subject to him—"I expect this touch of ague has upset the child's nerves. The ague does upset the nerves, Mrs Newsham. I never felt so shaken in my life as that time off Vera Cruz; and I used to turn white and red, till I had all the youngsters laughing at me. Strange disease! strangest disease under the sun! and the curious part of the matter is, that hundreds of people have the ague, and think they have something else. And it is an extraordinary complaint, for one attack quite changes the constitution."

Clara was glad the Admiral had started off on the ague, and so encouraged him. "Indeed! How very curious! Now really, quite singular!"

"Yes; it is a fact, an undoubted fact, that one bad fit will change the whole constitution. My constitution has never been the same since that first attack off Vera Cruz. And do you know, Mrs Newsham, there's Adela—her whole nervous system has been changed! When I was at Eastcourt a month ago, she was like a piece

of white duck—hardly ever had a bit of red in her cheeks! I remarked her particularly, because Nellie is always changing colour, and has a new face every two minutes; but Adela is quite altered now. And I am rather surprised those pills have not set her right by this; though they will cure her in the end," he said stanchly, like a true believer,—"I never knew them fail."

"Take no notice of Adela, my dear Admiral," said Clara softly, and she smiled again, as if pleasantly interested; but she did not like all this observing and remarking. "You are quite right, my dear Admiral. It is just what you say: Adela's nerves are a little overdone, and this attack has certainly upset her. But, my dear Admiral, just take no notice of her."

"Take no notice of her! Take no notice of her! Why, I defy you not to notice the child, Mrs Newsham! for there she goes blushing and blushing, just as if the Dancer were her first admirer, and the ropes and spars were paying her marked attention. Ha! ha! ha!"

Clara hesitated. She did not know quite what to say.

The Admiral grew serious again. "But joking apart, Mrs Newsham," he said, "I am getting rather anxious about the child. Those pills ought to have had more effect. I think Bluehaven is too relaxing for her. It is a very relaxing place."

"Relaxing! My dear Admiral, Bluehaven is a very, very bracing place. Dr Fozzle considers it an exceed-

ingly bracing place. That is why he sent the Bishop here."

"Dr Fozzle!" cried the Admiral, with the sort of look he would have cast upon an "old tub," for whose seagoing capacity he had an unutterable contempt—"Dr Fozzle!"

"Dr Fozzle is the first opinion in the diocese. I think very highly of him," said Clara, shortly.

But the Admiral was not easily suppressed on the subject of doctors. He was in the habit of saying, "When the dosers find a cure for the yellow jack, I'll believe in them; but not till then." He himself had enjoyed wonderfully good health, and had never had any illness but the ague; so he thoroughly believed in the ague, and indeed thought that whoever was ill must have the ague, and could have nothing else. But it was no doctor cured him of the ague. Dr Molony, of H.M.S. Crasher, was about as great an old quack as you could find anywhere. Why, he could not even cure his own sea-sickness! He was the worst sailor the Admiral had ever known; and on the rare occasions when he was not ill over the side, he was half-seas over. Lord bless his soul! it was not Molony had cured him. It was those wonderful quinine pills had pulled him through! And the pills were a patent medicine given him by a messmate, who had bought them in New York, on the strength of a glowing advertisement. This advertisement was wrapped round every box, and being frequently read and re-read by the Admiral, tended to confirm his own idea that the

pills which had cured him would cure the whole world.

"I am amazed, Mrs Newsham," said the Admiral, indignantly—"I am amazed you can think highly of a man who could send the Bishop to Bluehaven, and call it a bracing place. Dr Fozzle! arrant old humbug, Mrs Newsham! arrant old humbug! Just like the rest of them. Now I should like to meet Dr Fozzle, and tell him how thoroughly this place disagrees with the Bishop. I wonder you don't see it yourself, Mrs Newsham! The Bishop was looking comparatively well when he came here, and we have all remarked the change in him. All the children see it. And I was only speaking to Newsham on the subject yesterday; and even he sees it, and strongly advises an immediate change to Eastcourt. I intend speaking to him again to-day; for it is quite clear the Bishop will be seriously ill if he stays on here. Dr Fozzle is preparing a nice case for himself. Dr Fozzle indeed! Best opinion in the diocese! Calls Bluehaven a bracing place! Lord bless my soul!"

A mutiny on board the Admiral's own ship could never have astonished him more than the state of his own mind now astonished Clara. The Admiral was becoming a dangerous man! And he had actually meddled with Thomas. He had put notions into Thomas's blind head, and intended to put more. And no doubt he had called Dr Fozzle a humbug to the Bishop!

But a moment's reflection brought an idea into

Clara's mind: it was not a bad one to find in a hurry. "Well, my dear Admiral," she said, thoughtfully—and though very angry with him, she did manage to smile quite prettily upon him—"well, my dear Admiral, do you know, I too have been feeling just, just a little anxious about the dear Bishop, and I am not quite, quite certain Dr Fozzle has altogether perfectly understood the case."

"I am sure he has not," cried the believer in one, and only one, sort of pill.

"You see, my dear Admiral," continued Clara, "unfortunately, most unfortunately, Dr Fozzle has no opinion of tonics. He never seems to give quinine."

"I should think not indeed! would have no patients if he did. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Poor Dr Fozzle! Poor, dear Dr Fozzle!" And Clara laughed with the Admiral; and then Clara put on such a prettily coaxing little manner, that the Admiral could not help feeling she really was the most charming of charming women. And Clara said what she had intended to say for the last two minutes.

"Now, my dear, dear Admiral, do you know—do you know what I am going to propose to you? You are such a very dear kind man that I would ask you to do quite an unpleasant thing—what I would not think of asking anybody else in the whole world to do. Now I know it is very difficult to get my dear father to take anything he does not fancy, and he has no faith at all in medicine, none whatever! The dear Bishop is really very, very naughty in that way. But

if only, if only, my dear Admiral, you could manage to make him take just one little box of your quinine pills, I am sure you would find Bluehaven would agree quite well with him. And I should think you, oh, my dear Admiral, I should think you such a very clever man! And so very, very kind!"

The Admiral was delighted at the idea! quite delighted! He instantly, without any delay whatever, set to doctoring the Bishop.

In an incredibly short time he informed Mrs Newsham that he no longer thought Bluehaven disagreed with her Right Reverend father, although he still considered Dr Fozzle was entirely wrong in calling it a bracing place.

However, there were drawbacks to the Admiral's pill practice; he took such an extraordinary interest in his patients that he was perpetually visiting and watching them. He insisted on doctoring Thomas too. The consequence was, that unless he happened to be out in the Dancer keenly watching Adela's symptoms, he was sure to be in the rectory study closeted with the Bishop and Thomas.

Clara thought the half-pay system a national misfortune, as it stranded men accustomed to an active life when their superabundant energy was still unpleasantly vigorous; and she wondered if her cousin, Sir Cutlass Cutter, one of the sea lords, could not put the Admiral on full pay and order him out of the country. She began to wish him off the west coast of Africa, for there was the Bishop taking a violent

fancy to him! People would not unfrequently fall in love with the Admiral.

Clara was getting thoroughly provoked with the vigorous sailor. He spoke his mind so freely, told the Bishop exactly what he thought of Dr Fozzle and of Bluehaven, and then enlivened the Right Reverend grandpapa with stories about the "children" and their sayings and doings—just those little stories which Clara would rather not have had repeated. And he even enticed Thomas out for a sail in the Dancer, so that Thomas might see all the fun. The childlike innocence and openness of nature which had once made Clara fond of the Admiral, were now what she most disliked in him. It was this very guilelessness and his perfect faith in herself which threatened to endanger the success of her little plan. Clara felt that the ba-lamb gambolling without cunning, as instinct prompts its simple heart, is a decided mistake in matters of intricate diplomacy. She determined to get rid of the Admiral.

She seized the first opportunity of doing so. It would not have seemed a very promising one to anybody but herself. The Admiral showed her a letter he had got from Kate Crofton giving rather a better account of Sir Cuthbert. And what did Clara do but instantly persuade him, with a sort of melancholy tenderness of manner infinitely disquieting to his apprehensive kindliness, that from the supposed nature of the disease it was really a worse one!

"To my mind, the worst account we have yet had;

for you see, my dear Admiral, Kate does not say poor dear Sir Cuthbert's strength is keeping up. She does not wish to make us too unhappy!"

The Admiral was devotedly attached to his nephew Cuthbert, who was like a second son to him; and Clara worked upon his feelings to such a degree, that he actually started that very afternoon for Crofton Place! though it went to his heart to leave Bluehaven while the Dancer was "out." He only had "her" out for seven weeks of the year, during Charlie's holidays. She had been built on his own lines, and there never was so perfect a little nine-tonner; she had a flying jib that was not exactly like any other jib, and no vessel of her size ever sailed as she did.

Clara accompanied the Admiral to the railway station, being afraid he might change his mind and get less unhappy about Sir Cuthbert if he took that seven miles' drive alone without any one to depress his spirits. Her last words to him were, "I am sure poor dear Sir Cuthbert wants a tonic. Now, my dear Admiral, I am sure he does!"

"If only," thought Clara, "the Admiral could persuade himself Sir Cuthbert has the ague, he would certainly stay away for the next ten days, and then George would have gone to his crammer, and we should all be leaving Bluehaven."

Clara was perfectly aware George kept out of her way. "If I were not here, he would be a great deal more with Adela than he is, for he would come down

from the Lookout with Charlie every evening. I can see he is afraid of me, and perhaps thinks I am against this match. I quite remember I told Kate I was against it, that time four years ago, at Eastcourt. Kate may have told him. I meant her to tell him."

So Clara, having got rid of the Admiral, proceeded to get rid of herself. She said she really must—now really she must—go home, just for a day or two, to see how Rockhurst and Tom were getting on with the tutor who was coaching them during the holidays. This "coach" had been invented—to the boys' intense disgust—by Clara entirely in order to keep them at Eastcourt out of the way.

Clara went home "to look after the boys and their tutor," and also to see Miss Smith and the younger children. Clara has a particular talent for finding plausible excuses, and invariably has the best reasons for doing whatever she wishes to do.

The careful mother left Thomas at Bluehaven "as a chaperon" to the two girls, but with no orders to look after them; she only gave him injunctions to read certain excellent books aloud to the really spiritual-minded Bishop. Though not a good reader, Thomas read better than he talked, because he paid more consecutive attention to his reading than to his conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

When the Admiral went away, the Dancer had to be left at her moorings: she was not safe for the boys to handle alone. Indeed there were wiseacres down in the village who shook their heads and declared she was not over-safe for the Admiral in a breeze: these were certain very knowing superannuated old salts, who apparently passed their life on the tiny pier, perpetually looking through a spy-glass, usually at nothing. Wet or dry, there they were! and they never wore a coat—only trousers, a jersey, and a pair of braces. They liked having the Dancer to look at, and would follow her through the spy-glass for a whole afternoon. They really took a pride in her, and were on cordial, even affectionate, terms with the Admiral; and yet, after an oracular fashion peculiarly their own, they were always damping the enthusiastic admiration the Admiral felt for his nine-tonner. He had actually risked the danger of taking the Dancer over to Cherbourg in breezy weather, in order to show them what sort of craft she was. Still, though secretly impressed by this feat, they would never say so, but continued

to disparage her. Then they none of them liked that new-fangled jib. Now the jib was the joy of the Admiral's heart.

"We'll miss the Dancer," said Tom Bracer, the old salts' chief spokesman. "That we 'ull. But Master Charlie, he never could handle her; and Master George, he's no good. The likes of them couldn't manage that 'ere jib. That 'ere jib 'ull sink her some day. Ay, ay! she's none too safe with the Admiral on board—none too safe!" And the other oracles chimed in as was their wont, "That 'ere jib 'ull do it!"

The Admiral, on leaving, had given his son Charlie the key of the boathouse, and had told him he might make use of the punt or the gig. George only cared for sea-fishing; and that, he declared, was impossible in the gig. So the day after Clara's departure for Eastcourt, when George felt he might once more be comfortable on shore, he begged the kindly Thomas to let him ride one of the carriage-horses, as nobody went out driving now. He borrowed a saddle from the surgeon-apothecary, and, to the disgust of Harper the coachman, rode one horse in the morning and the other in the afternoon. He was so well amused that he got into very good humour, stopped "sapping" in the evening, came down to the rectory, and as he had not seen the girls all day, and Clara was not there to watch him, did not mind joining in a round game so long as he had not Adela for a partner. Whenever the Bishop could be enticed to play, Adela was given to him, and George took Thomas. As for

Charlie and Nellie, they would only play with each other.

Now that George was perpetually riding the carriage horses on shore, Adela liked boating better than she had ever done before, especially as she thought Charlie would not dare to take the gig over the bar. Charles Crofton and Nellie would have liked Adela to stay at home; but they did not say so—no, not even to each other. Nellie would have been ashamed to confess so unkindly a feeling, and she tried hard to think she liked having Adela very much indeed; yet she could not help agreeing with Charlie, who had cordially adopted George's opinion, that Adela was an "awful duffer."

"I say, Nell, did you ever see such an awful duffer as Adela? She is always in a funk for fear she would be drowned. By Jove, what a fuss she will make to-morrow when I rig up the sail I've found at the back of the boathouse! And what a glorious lark we shall have shaving those islands! I can tell you, I mean to astonish the men in the village and show Tom Bracer and old Jack Rullock I know how to steer!"

Next day Charlie hoisted his sail, to Adela's horror. The "glorious lark" of "shaving the islands" terrified her. Her practical mind saw the great danger very clearly. As a fact, they really did run a fearful risk. For Charlie's sake, Nellie had thrown herself into his grand ambition of showing Tom Bracer and Jack Rullock he could steer, and, for the moment, it ab-

sorbed her, like him, to the exclusion of all other feelings.

Charlie was so immensely elated at having shaved the islands successfully, that he proposed to go back and shave them again.

Poor Adela loudly protested—"I don't want to be drowned." This sent the other two into fits of laughter.

"Adela, you always do think you are going to be drowned!" cried Nellie.

"Adela, you are a duffer! You funk everything," cried Charlie.

But Adela said with much truth, "You know very well, Charlie, that if you come to grief in the straits, with those high rocks at each side, and deep water all round, you'll save Nellie, and you won't save me, and I can't swim."

Charlie was intensely amused at this idea, so laughed the more.

"I insist on your landing me," said Adela with much decision.

"Can't!" said Charlie; "we are too far from shore. By the time we had gone in and come out again, it would be too late for the straits. You can only shave through at half tide."

"But you must land me. I won't be drowned! I won't!" cried Adela piteously.

Nellie was moved to compassion by her frightened look, and although she thought her fears ridiculous and groundless, she pleaded for her with Charlie: "Do

land her! do, Charlie! Land her, as she is frightened."

Charles Crofton had set the rudder straight for the islands, and had not swerved an inch at Adela's prayer, but at Nellie's voice a wavering look crossed his firm countenance. Adela saw it.

"Land me! Land me anywhere! Land me here, Charlie—here, on Rocky Islet! Stop! stop! There's time."

And there was time—just enough, but only just, to lower the sail and stop the gig's way with an oar. The oar caught a crab. Adela thought they were over, and she gave such a jump out of the boat that she landed half-way up the islet, and uttered such a scream that Charlie and Nellie sailed away with renewed merriment. Adela stood on the rock and watched them gliding along, and their laughter came back to her across the water.

Charlie was right; half tide was the time for shaving the islands. Later on the rush of water made the small channel too dangerous. There was more risk in going west towards Bluehaven than east, as you entered the straits by the narrower end, where they were but six feet wide; and the current was against you.

One of Charlie's chief reasons for wishing to "shave the islands" again, was that as yet he had only done so from the less dangerous side.

The breeze had freshened. The little gig flew swiftly before the summer wind like a joyous bird on

the wing. They were almost upon the islands when Charlie suddenly saw he had miscalculated the tide, and saw his little craft could not stem the strong current of the risen water rushing through the narrow opening between the rocks. Quick as thought he put the rudder round, thrust the tiller into Nellie's hand, crying out to her to hold it fast, and tried to lower the madly flapping sail. For one full minute it seemed as if the shivering boat must be caught by the current and hurled against the rocks. There is a long suspense in sixty seconds when suddenly they are stopped like a wound-out watch, in the presence of death.

"We are safe," said Charles Crofton at last, with a pale and deathly sort of calm; and he quietly took the tiller out of Nellie's shaking hand.

She was trembling violently. The death-scare was still in her face. "We were a long, long time in awful danger," she said, and heaved a sigh of deep relief. Charlie did not speak again. "I thought of so many things," she said; "some of them I had forgotten years ago." He did not speak. "Charlie," she whispered, "when you and I do really die, I hope we shall die quickly. It was horrible to be so long." But Charlie still was silent. His face was sternly set, and his awestruck, absent look made Nellie grow silent too.

The gig sailed on towards Bluehaven, quite in safe water now. The little waves, parted by the boat, rippled loudly to Nellie's ear; the small mast creaked, and she heard the curlew cry: but these sounds only seemed to mark the more intensely that silence which

overpowered her and stayed the flow of words which would have eased the strange emotion of renewed life.

At length it was Charlie and not she who broke the long silence. He spoke as if awaking from a dream, and unaware how long that dream had been. "Nell," he said eagerly, coming quite back to life—"oh, Nell! you would have been drowned! That current must have sucked you down."

"But you would have tried to save me, Charlie; I know you would!"

"I could not have saved you, Nell," he said in a low voice. "But we should have died together."

Her large sweet eyes met his with a look of holy trust, and her voice was very tender as she answered—

"I knew you would have laid down your life in trying to save mine. I knew you would have died to save me. Ah, Charlie, I knew you would!"

"I am glad you knew it, Nell," said he simply, and silence once more fell upon them, but this time like a pleasant dream to both. It was unfelt by Nellie.

How softly the hushed mind will sleep while we sail onwards before the breeze upon a summer sea! The gurgling wavelets which soon get so vaguely monotonous of sound, the languor in the air, the voices coming over the water like dreams from the land, all lull to an unthinking rest.

The gig went straight before the wind, past Bluehaven and down the creek beyond to the point where that first bend of land takes place, and there it became

necessary to tack, and the spell of unconscious silence was broken. Dreamland vanished away.

"We have forgotten Adela!" said Charles Crofton suddenly.

"Adela!" cried Nellie, aghast. She had never once thought of her.

"It will take some time to beat back to Rocky Islet again," said Charlie, looking out anxiously over the bay. Nellie's eyes followed his, and she realised how far the scudding sail had carried the little gig.

"The water never covers Rocky Islet — never, Charlie!" But there was a great fear in Nellie's heart which her words in vain belied.

The stern, set look came over Charles Crofton's face again. "It is covered during the spring tides," he said hoarsely; "but I do not know how much. We have the spring tides now."

When Adela had seen the gig put back at the very mouth of the island straits, her joy in being relieved from a horrid certainty had been great; but when she saw it scudding before the breeze towards Bluehaven, then passing the village, and still flying onwards down the creek, her first feeling gave place to a growing uneasiness.

"Nellie has forgotten me, and Charlie is glad to be rid of me. Nellie forgets so quickly when she is pleased, and she will enjoy running before the wind with Charlie. She and Charlie like to be together. It is not awkward for them, because Nellie is not grown up, so Charlie can never think she is in love

with him; and you can be so happy and comfortable if people don't think that. I wish I were not grown up," sighed Adela; and she whiled away two whole minutes thinking how much she would dislike to be sailing all alone with George as her sister sailed with Charlie,—"though George," thought she, "would not do the dreadful dangerous things Charlie is so fond of."

But Adela had not the sort of mind which lives by nature in the picture-land where every passing fancy paints itself, and where your dreams stand out before you in such vivid colours that, gazing, you beget fresh thoughts and see new tints, and so turn to look once more, then look again, and yet again, till the moment of some rude awakening comes. Nellie could thus dream hours away; but Adela never stayed long in dreamland—practical realities always stood too clearly before her mind.

She now was wide awake, and saw the tide was coming in, and had already covered the little strip of sand which fringed the crescent-shaped hollow of the rock. The islet was just like a horse-shoe, only one end was round, and rose much higher out of the water than the other, and at a distance looked like a big ball forgotten accidentally upon the narrow ledge, as if on some stormy day the waves had been at play, and had left their rough ball behind them.

Adela was dreadfully bored sitting all alone and with nothing to think of. It was not till after what seemed to her an endless time of dreary waiting that

she saw the gig put round and begin to tack towards her. "They have remembered me at last! but they have been a long time about it." And naturally enough she was vexed, especially as the tide was running in so quickly. "I shall wet my feet getting into the boat when it does come," thought the practical Adela.

She was seated on a level with the water, looking out over the bar into the open sea beyond the haven's mouth, and as the tide got higher it seemed as if the whole sea were rising to flow in upon her, and one wave bigger than the rest rushed up so far upon the rock that it almost caught her feet. But Adela was not frightened. She was sure that at the highest tide the round projecting boulder never could be covered, "because grass grows on the flat top, and there is no seaweed." With untroubled presence of mind, and carefully picking her steps where there were pools on the rocky ledge, she climbed up on to the small grass-grown plateau, some five feet broad, and sat there looking down upon the sea, which from that height seemed calm enough. She quietly watched the gig slowly tacking up the bay.

Adela was never tortured by imaginary fears. She did not think, as many would, "To-day the tide may come a little higher than it ever has before; a large wave may roll in, as waves have done upon a calm sea when a storm was coming from the ocean, or an earthquake had convulsed some foreign shore. With all her horror of being drowned, it was only of

what she considered sure danger that she was afraid.

She little suspected the anguish Charlie and her sister were suffering on her account. It surprised her to see they had lowered the sail and were rowing quickly towards her, and it greatly pleased her, for she said to herself, "Perhaps Charlie will now allow I have some common-sense. I told him he was sure to be drowned if he went through the straits again, and he would not believe me, but he had to turn back after all. I told him the sail was dangerous, and now he has lowered it of his own accord."

Adela liked to be thought very sensible. That was the chief reason why the awkwardness about George and the Admiral's little jokes had been so painful to her. She had been made to feel silly, and this hurt the pride she took in her own common-sense. Adela had always felt she was sensible and Nellie foolish; but of late everybody and everything seemed to have conspired to make her appear silly and Nellie sensible. This cruel injustice had been very hard to bear.

When Charlie and Eleanour at length came near enough to be sure Adela was safe, Nellie was so overcome by revulsion of feeling from terror to joy, that she stopped rowing and sobbed aloud. Charlie, too, was moved, though not to tears. They were like two murderers reprieved, for they had felt like guilty murderers all this long, long time, since first they remembered Adela. Ages seemed to them to have passed

since then. "But what," they had thought over and over again—"what must this horrible, dragged-out suspense be to poor Adela?"

For one minute—they now knew it could really have taken them no longer to have lowered the sail, unshipped the oars, and put round the gig at the islands,—so for one minute, and only one, they had been face to face with death this day, and yet there had been a lifetime in those slowly passing seconds. What then must the last long hour have been to Adela?

Fearing Adela might have lost her senses through terror, Charlie, as he neared the rock, shouted out to her, "Don't jump! don't jump! You will sink the boat. For God's sake, Adela, don't jump!"

"I have not the very slightest intention of jumping," said Adela, in a self-possessed, piqued little voice. "But I really beg you will bring the boat near enough for me to get into it without wetting my feet. I will stay where I am sooner than wet my feet."

Ghosts unexpectedly come back amongst living men have said startling things, but no speech of a returned spirit ever surprised two people more than these composed annoyed little words of Adela's now astonished her sister and Charlie. They were dumb with amazement; Adela astounded them. The only emotion she seemed to feel was the fear of wetting her feet!

She climbed down slowly and deliberately from the

round projecting rock; but in getting into the boat she did wet one foot, and for several minutes this misfortune seemed to engross her whole attention. "I hate getting my feet wet," she said; and she scolded Charlie for not having held the boat-hook steadier, and Nellie for having caught a crab just as she was stepping into the gig. Her fretfulness about her wet shoe and stocking sounded to her dazed companions as the complaint of some one buried alive might do, if the living corpse sat up in her coffin and found fault with the people who had undone the lid awkwardly in their hurry. "We nearly murdered her, and she says nothing about it," thought the conscience-stricken culprits.

Adela had all the talk to herself. She wondered if it would be better to take off her stocking or leave it on? She would take off the boot at any rate. Then, after hesitating if she would not take off the stocking too, she finally did take it off. To her surprise, Charlie pulled off his flannel jacket, and insisted on making a warm nest, and he wrapped up her little foot in it quite tenderly.

"How polite you are, Charlie! You are not generally so polite to me, but only to Nellie. How very extraordinary!" And Adela looked up in naïve astonishment at Charlie; and then she looked at her sister. "Something has happened," she said; "why, Nellie, you have been crying!"

"Oh, Adela, Adela!" exclaimed Nellie, passionately, "forgive me, forgive me! I forgot you; we both for-

got you. And we thought Rocky Islet was covered at the spring tides, and we—we thought you would be drowned!"

"Adela," said Charlie, looking at her with admiration — yes, unmistakably with admiration,—"I will never call you a duffer or a funk again. You have not felt one bit afraid. You have not," he added, though the avowal cost him a great deal—"you have not been as much shaken by seeing death quite near as Nellie and I were to-day."

Adela's fair face flushed with pleasure. She forgot the boredom and vexation of the last hour, so delighted was she to be thought sensible once more; but she was perfectly truthful by nature, and never wished to take more credit for anything than was exactly her due. "I knew the rock was never quite covered at high-water, or I should not have asked you to land me there."

"But in a storm," cried Nellie, "a big wave would cover it."

"There was no storm," said Adela, shortly.

"But an earthquake's wave might have rolled in." Nellie had thought of the earthquake possibility.

"So like you, Nellie, to think of that!" exclaimed Adela, with an air of immense superiority to her younger sister. "Earthquake! ridiculous nonsense! Now, Charlie, that is silly, is it not?"

But dreadful possibilities had entered his head too, and he repeated, "Adela, I am awfully sorry I ever called you a duffer."

Adela felt just like her own sensible self again. How delightful it was to be recognised as a person who had no silly fanciful fears! She began to improve the occasion. "And now, Charlie," she said, "I think for once you will allow I was right and you were wrong. The island straits were really dangerous?"

"Yes," said Charlie, humbly enough.

"And it was quite sensible of me not to wish to be drowned?"

"Certainly," said Charlie.

"All right," said Adela. "And now we'll row home."

"We had better sail," said Charlie; "the wind is in our favour, and Nellie is dead beat."

But Adela was strangely frightened at this proposal, and protested loudly against it.

"Well, Adela," cried Charlie, "you are odd. You will face danger calmly one moment, and be terrified the next when there is none. It is quite safe sailing."

"Oh yes; to be sure, quite safe! And it was quite safe shaving those islands!" said Adela, triumphantly.

At this the other two felt awkward, and Adela had her own way about the sail. But Charlie and Eleanour eased their burdened feelings by exclaiming, "Adela, you are odd!"

"Not odd at all," replied Adela; "only sensible. I am not afraid when there is no danger, and I am when there is. I am always frightened going up the

Dancer's side, because if I slipped I should be drowned; and I knew the straits were dangerous before you both had the sense to know it; and I now know there will be an accident with that sail, and then I should certainly be drowned, for you would both forget me and only save each other."

It was in vain her sister and Charlie vowed they would never forget her again, and faithfully promised always to remember her.

"No; you will forget me all the same," said the practical Adela; "I know you will. You will forget, just as you did to-day. I don't want to be drowned; so I am quite determined never to go out boating with you again. When I was waiting for you on Rocky Islet, I made up my mind on that point, and settled I would stay at home in future, and ride that broken-winded pony who has been eating his head off in the rectory field ever since we came. If you don't make a silly fuss, papa will never know I am not out boating, or poor dear grandpapa either—they never know where we are or what we are doing."

Charlie and Eleanour implored Adela to trust them again. They felt in honour bound to beg her very warmly not to stay on shore in future. But Adela was firm. And if the real truth be told, they liked her all the better for her stanch refusal.

"No, no; I'll never go out in the gig again," she declared, and then suddenly changed colour and added nervously, "not — not unless mamma should come back unexpectedly, for then I know she would

make me go out boating—I know she would; and she would not let George ride the carriage-horses any more."

"But I say, Adela," said Charlie, somewhat maliciously, "if George came out boating too, you would be quite safe. He would save you."

"No, he would not," replied the girl decidedly, and then coloured violently.

"You must not tease Adela, Charlie. You mustn't!" cried Nellie; "we have been so cruel to her to-day. Oh, it was very cruel to forget you, Adela! and I don't know what made us forget you. I never forgot you before."

From that day forth, for a whole week, Adela rode the rector's broken-winded pony every afternoon. George still continued to ride the carriage-horses, but whilst he trotted off in one direction, Adela went the opposite way. They managed so well, and had such good sight, and saw each other such a long, long distance off, that they never once met.

CHAPTER IX.

How full of happy chance is life to some! Fate seems by little kindly acts to woo them on to joy. The very sun will shine for them, while the evil accident of rain will part two others who might have loved as well as they.

August so often ends in storm and wet, as if the dying summer were in tears, and wept because its pleasant days had passed away. But this year the summer lingered smiling to the last. There was no chill of coming autumn in the air.

The soft breeze which moved upon the blue sea by day would fall to rest with the setting sun, and at night would sleep with the moonlight on the water; but only to rise again next day and fill the white sails that now for long hours would waft Charles Crofton and the young girl he loved far away into a pleasant world of their own. A change had come over Charlie. He no longer attempted dangerous feats of adventure, but seemed content to let the little gig drift quietly before the light wind.

"I am glad we are alone together," he would say.

"We can speak when we wish, and be silent when we are tired of talking. I often like to sail on in silence, Nell."

"And so do I, Charlie; for then I listen to the boat going through the water, and to the noise of the little sail. And I love to hear the curlew crying upon that distant bank or out at sea. It is all so like a dream, that it is a pity to wake up and talk."

"Yes; it is like a dream!"

But for him the dream was in her tender beauty, and in the love which had stolen into his heart, though he did not clearly know it. Silence was pleasant to him, for he was gazing on Nellie, and could not tire of gazing upon that tender, touching face.

George Eliot has said there are faces which nature charges with a meaning and a pathos not belonging to the single human soul that flutters beneath them, but speaking the joys and sorrows of foregone generations. And this is wonderfully true. We all have seen that look which seems bequeathed to some by the joys now pulseless, and the buried sorrows of the people who have gone before us in this world: a look bequeathed by the poor girl who loved one man, and was forced to wed another; by the mother's rapturous joy over the child long since dead, as she is dead; but the anguish of the parted ones whose very name no one on earth remembers now. For like the lingering colours which tell us of a sun that is set, there are lights upon some young faces, and shades in

the depths of touching eyes, not old enough as yet to have wept the tears of hopeless grief. You will sometimes see those lights and shadows of far-off emotions on the faces of quite young children, and will wonder at them.

Nellie was still almost a child, and her large beseeching eyes spoke emotions that as yet she had not felt; but within her soul there was the power to feel the joy and sorrow they could express, so they were true eyes. They were not like Clara's.

Nellie had not her mother's firm, clear-cut features. Her face was all soft expression; it was full of the power to feel, but with no look that told of the character which can withstand strong feeling. There was no strength anywhere. The pretty, cherry-coloured little mouth was weak, and the round, dimpled chin slightly receded. Her blue-grey eyes, deeper than her mother's, were darkly set. They were her beauty; they were her whole face; they pleaded for the love she needed. Her colouring was of tender fairness. She had Clara's transparently white skin, but its marble was not cold. Like Galatea, the statue lived, and the colour came and went, and came again, into her cheek with all the warmth of a young life. There was nothing cold about Nellie. Her auburn hair was very warm in hue, and the little straying curls which danced upon her forehead and her neck made soft shadows there.

The young man, whose buoyant life and desire for movement and for talk her presence stilled so strange-

ly, was a contrast to herself. His strongly marked features were like his father's, only the high nose and clearly defined chin seemed larger than the Admiral's, perhaps because he was just at that age when the roundness of the face, like that of the figure, has not yet been fully moulded. Charlie's blue eyes were smaller than his father's, but there was more fire in them. He was a good-looking, fairish-haired, tall young Englishman. His smile was a joyous one, but in repose there was a marked expression of set purpose on his face.

When Nellie, feeling his long, dreaming gaze upon her, would, wondering, raise her sweet, pathetic eyes to his, it was a calm and steadfast look she met—a grave look, such as we see in the old paintings on the faces of holy men who gaze with untroubled joy upon the blessed Virgin.

"Charlie," the young girl would say—it was she who oftenest broke the dreamlike silence—"Charlie, what a pity it is that there will be no sea in heaven!" This regret came back to her two or three times. "It is a sad, sad pity there will be no sea in heaven! Some people think," she said, "there will not even be a lake of clear, cool water; and I love the water! The very sounds that come across it seem as if they really did not come from land. And I love the pleasant coolness of the air! And when it is calm, as now it often is in the evening, I do so like to see the low banks near the bar, and the cliffs at the Lookout, and the little pier, and the houses in the village, and those few

trees beyond, and the islands too, all looking down into the bay as if each one had found a kind, kind friend so like itself that it could whisper every little secret of its heart and never feel afraid! It is so happy," she sighed, "never to feel afraid!"

Charlie woke from his dreams, and startled her by saying earnestly, "Nellie, you will never be afraid of me? Promise you never will be afraid of me." And she promised what he asked; but in her inmost soul she feared a little as she gave her word, yet knew not why.

One day, towards the close of the pleasant week, she said, "Charlie, do you think heaven will really be as happy as this earth?"

He hesitated a moment, from the sort of shyness which makes a serious young Englishman chary of touching upon a sacred subject; and then he said, in a low, grave voice, "There will be no parting in heaven. The people who like to be together will always be together."

Nellie was looking down into the water, and she repeated, as if whispering to the rippling tide, "They will always be together." And as she softly whispered, she felt Charlie's strong gaze fixed upon her.

"But will they be alone together?" cried the young man suddenly, with passion in his voice. He was quite near to Nellie in the stern of the little gig, and she started, bewildered by some new sensation, and by the changed eager look she saw in his face, and by the strangeness of his voice. Frightened as much by

her own emotion as by his, she shrank away from him.

He too drew back, and felt as if she had wounded him. There had been other words upon his lips, but they were chilled into silence now.

She looked again at him, but he no longer looked at her. She thought his face was rather hardly set, as if he were angry, and wondering much, and trembling to her own surprise, she gently, for a moment, but no more, put her little shaking hand on his, and he felt her draw near to him again—yet not so near, he thought, as she had been before.

"Ah, Charlie!" she said, "you startled me a little, for your voice was strange." Then, as he said nothing, she continued, rather sadly—"There will be so many people in heaven whom we shall love, for angels love everybody, that I do not think two angels will ever be left quite quiet and alone together——" she was going to say, "as you and I have been." But she gave a little sigh instead, then tried to say the words, then could not say them, for Charlie was still strange and absent, as he had been that day a week before when they had both seen death so near. She felt his silence once more painfully as she had felt it then. They were sailing down the haven before the wind as they had done that day, and, sailing onwards, she wondered why he was so absent now, and thought she would ask him, but could not, and then wondered why she could not, and why she was growing just a little shy with him, and could not ask him everything

quite easily. And she looked down over the boat's side and watched the small waves running past like the ungrasped thoughts through a sleeper's mind; and thus looking, she fell to vaguely dreaming to the sound of the water as if it had been soft music.

"Holloa, holloa! Look out! Wherever are you going? By Jove, you're into me, I say! Look out! look out, will you?" They had nearly swamped the punt with George Crofton in it. "Catch me coming out with telegrams for either of you again! I say, were you both asleep? By Jove, you're asleep still! Throw me that paynter, can't you? and I'll step on board while you read the telegram, and we'll tow the punt. Steady, steady there, Nellie!"

She was making room for George by changing her seat.

"Why should you move?" said Charlie, looking as if she had wounded him again, and she stepped back quickly to her place beside him, jostling George, who was just getting into the gig, and nearly upsetting them all in her hurry.

"By Jove!" cried George, "thought we were over. Bad luck's in the air. Hope," he said, giving a telegram to Charlie, and speaking with a kind of blunt emotion,—"hope there's . . . there's no bad news? Uncle Cuthbert not dead?"

"Dead!" exclaimed Nellie, turning pale, as if she realised the full meaning of that dread word.

George sat quite still and looked away while Charles Crofton read the telegram, but Nellie anxiously watched

Charlie's countenance: it fell as he read. He read the lines twice over, then crumpled the paper absently in his hand.

"Show it to me," said Nellie. "He is not dead," she cried, on glancing over it; "but oh, Charlie, Charlie, must you go?"

Her pained voice brought such joy into Charlie's face that George, looking up, saw it, and mistaking the reason of it, said warmly—

"No bad news, I see. Awfully glad, my dear fellow—awfully glad. Met the telegraph boy out riding—was awfully afraid something gone wrong. That's why I came off in such a deuced hurry."

Charlie was sufficiently himself to answer—"Thanks awfully!"

"But it is not good news," said Nellie. "The Admiral won't come back here again, and he wants Charlie to go to Crofton Place immediately—to-morrow!"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed George, "wait till Saturday. I am going to that old fool of a crammer on Saturday."

"But the Admiral thinks you are going there to-morrow, George," said Nellie; and she read the telegram aloud—

"Cuthbert better. Trying quinine pills. Will lay up Dancer. Come here rest holidays. George going crammer to-morrow. Leave with him."

"But I'm not going to-morrow," broke in George; "I'm not going till the day after. I won't go till Saturday morning. Mrs Newsham is not coming back till Saturday afternoon."

George spoke quite naturally, without reflecting that what he said might sound odd to Mrs Newsham's daughter; but neither she nor Charlie noticed this little slip of the tongue. They were thinking — "Then we shall have another day together."

"I say, Charlie," said George, "telegraph back to the Admiral that you'll stay till Saturday. He won't mind. The answer is prepaid, and the boy is waiting for it up at the Lookout. You'd better make for shore."

As they were sailing in, George exclaimed, "By Jove! but it is awfully jolly out here! I say, does Adela never come out now?"

"Not since the day we landed her on Rocky Islet, and . . . forgot her! We . . . we forgot her, though the tide was coming in," said Nellie, blushing.

George burst out laughing. "Forgot Adela on Rocky Islet! Ha! ha! And the tide coming in! By Jove, what an awful joke! Why did not you tell me before?"

George seemed delighted. "I say, that was a joke! Awful funk, I suppose? Thought she was drowning?"

"No! she was not a bit afraid," said Eleanour.

"Behaved like a brick, George," said Charlie, seriously. "George, you are unfair to Adela. She is not a duffer."

"Adela not a duffer?" stammered the astounded George, slowly trying to grasp this amazing idea.

"Adela . . . Adela's an awful duffer!" he exclaimed mechanically, as if clinging desperately to the old faith, because the new one was altogether too strange for belief.

"No!" said Charlie, decidedly; and he again repeated seriously, "she behaved like a brick."

"Yes indeed, indeed she did, George!" said Nellie; "and the rock was all covered except just one end, and if a big wave had rolled in . . . and a big wave might have come, George; you know it might! But Adela was not frightened, though she was quite an hour in horrid danger,—one whole hour! and one minute seems such a long, long time, if you think you are going to die! Oh, George, George," she cried with strong emotion, vividly remembering those sixty seconds passed by her and Charlie between life and death, and quite forgetting George knew nothing of that dangerous adventure — "oh, George, George, a minute is a long, long time to be near death! An instant would seem very long if you were dying. It is horrible to be a long time dying. Charlie and I felt how terrible it was. Even Charlie turned very pale, and looked frightened."

This incoherent outpouring was naturally unintelligible to George; but he was not a young man who bothered himself to understand very exactly everything that everybody said. On most subjects unconnected with cricket, or fishing, or hunting, a sort of general impression quite satisfied his mental indolence. His mind seized the words, "Charlie turned

pale, and looked frightened," and troubled about nothing else.

"I say, come now! Charlie frightened and Adela not! Bosh!" he exclaimed, contemptuously.

Charlie, like the Admiral, always tried to say or do what he thought strictly honourable. "Nellie has confused two sets of circumstances by the way she has spoken of them. But that's no matter. It is true, George," he said, "that once when Nellie and I were in danger of being drowned, during what seemed a long time, but what I now believe was only a short minute, I thought it awful to be near death, and I may have turned pale." Charlie spoke coolly enough.

But George, raw undeveloped lad as he was, divined the confession cost him an effort. He was of a generous nature, and if obtuse in most things, was not so in all. He answered quickly, but addressing Nellie, not Charlie,—"I am sure Charlie was awfully plucky all the same, and did just the right thing at the right moment."

"Yes, George, he did! He remembered everything, and I should not have remembered what to do at all."

"No; girls never do," said George shortly, and then added, in a tone of sharpness which surprised Nellie, "But I say, Nellie, you should never say a fellow funked when he did not. Charlie never funked in his life."

Charles's face flushed with pleasure, and George, still speaking to Nellie, went on—"A fellow who has sense knows when things are dangerous, and he does

not like to die any more than a fool; but he does not lose his head, or run away, or funk, for all that. Girls, who don't see half the danger, run away and funk."

This was a long speech on an abstract subject for George, but he was indignant that the courage of one he believed in like Charlie should be impugned.

"But I say," he asked, "if Adela is so awfully courageous, why is it she has funked boating ever since the day she was so mighty plucky? Odd, by Jove!"

"In case of an accident, she wants some one to save her from a ducking," said Charlie. "I say, George, she wants you!"

"In case of an accident, bags I Nellie!" cried George; and he looked with open childlike pleasure at the pretty young girl, as if he would be glad to jump into the water for her sake.

"Remember, Nellie, I bag you," he repeated. "Charlie bags Adela!"

"George," said Charlie, testily, "you do talk slang! Shocking bad form!"

George did look surprised! "By Jove! why, here's Charlie coming out all of a sudden as a professor of the English language! What an awful joke!" And he roared laughing. "But hang it!" he laughed, "slang or not slang, bags I Nellie!"

George, in true schoolboy fashion, enjoyed his own jokes immensely, no matter how small they were. Then Nellie was laughing too. Most young girls laugh at everything. George did not notice that Charlie was looking seriously annoyed. But Nellie

turned her laughing face towards his, and seeing him so grave, stopped laughing, as if there was no fun in laughter in which he did not join.

George laughed on. "I say, bags I Nellie! In case of shipwreck, Charlie bags Adela! Hang it, if I don't tell Adela you've bagged her, Charlie!" He looked at him now. "I'll die laughing if you're so glum! By Jove, I will! Charlie bags Adela!" George did enjoy this joke! He was enjoying himself altogether. "I declare it is awfully jolly out here," he exclaimed. "Awfully jolly, and cool, and all that sort of thing! And I think three is just the right number." He looked at Nellie as if it were very pleasant to see her and be with her. "Just the right number," he repeated; "much nicer than four. Don't be afraid, old fellow; I was only joking," he said to Charlie. "Catch me telling Adela anything! But, I say, I know what I'll do!" he added joyfully. "I'll come out sailing with you both to-morrow! I had better let the carriage-horses have a rest, as Mrs Newsham is coming home on Saturday, and Harper may tell tales. Besides, it will be awfully jolly out here—awfully! Only you and me, Nellie, and . . . and just Charlie, and no one else!"

There are happy people who always feel as if they must be welcome everywhere, so long as they themselves like to be with those whom they propose to join. George was one of these smilingly unconscious ones. He looked radiant, as if his proposal had undoubtedly given his companions the satisfaction it gave himself.

His cousin and Nellie stole glances of dismay at each other; but as the gig was just inshore, their absolute silence was covered by the interest of the moment. There is always a certain little excitement in running a boat properly on shore. George entered into it heart and soul.

"Well steered, Charlie! Well steered! I say, old fellow, let me steer to-morrow. Awfully jolly little gig! No notion she was so jolly! Much jollier than the Dancer. And, by Jove, she's bigger than I thought! On a calm day one might take her over the bar; and there was I thinking she was too small! Why, hang it, we might have had some sea-fishing after all!"

"Jump ashore, Charlie," cried George, "and run on! run on! Nellie and I will see the gig safe into the boathouse, and the punt too. I say, look sharp! or you'll have that telegraph fellow swearing at you for keeping him so long."

CHAPTER X.

NEXT day George was in a provokingly good humour. There was no getting rid of him.

Charlie said to him shortly, "I say, George, we can't make Nellie sea-sick by taking her over the bar; and there's no fishing inside."

"Awful bore!" replied George—"awful! but we'll knock about the harbour instead."

George did feel so remarkably good-natured coming out in this friendly sort of way with his cousin and Nellie, and without any hope of fishing.

"Nellie," said he, condescendingly, "Charlie says you would be sea-sick if we crossed the bar, so I've left all my tackle at home."

Nellie had to thank him as best she could. She did not do so very warmly, because she was put out he had not brought the tackle. She had arranged such a nice little plan in her head. She had meant to say, "George, do you know, I think you would have excellent fishing from Rocky Islet. Adela saw plenty of fish there the other day. Suppose we land you there, and take a short sail, and come

back." And she had quite settled George would jump at the idea. So her disappointment was great.

Virtue is certainly its own reward. George felt so perfectly satisfied with his own unselfishness, that he was blinded by the glory of his own amiability, and noticed nothing. He did not see that Charlie was decidedly cross, or that Nellie was not at all in her wonted spirits, and he kept on repeating with much hearty enjoyment, "Awfully jolly out here! sorry I never came out with you before." It is true he was steering at the moment; and he went on steering for a very long time. An endless time it seemed to Eleanour; for she was always hoping that when Charlie began to steer, George would get bored, and wish to be landed. George used to get dreadfully bored out in the Dancer. He was a young man who soon got bored if not actively occupied.

At length the moment did arrive when George became aware he had been steering ever since they had left shore. He changed places with Charlie; and soon after he ceased to exclaim, "Awfully jolly out here!" He began to get restless and observant.

"Holloa! How silent you both are! Sorry after all I did not bring my tackle. Might perhaps have hooked a stray herring in the bay. Would have been something to do." He yawned; and then he got a regular fit of yawning.

All of a sudden he brightened up in the most surprising way.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "if that's not young

Tom Bracer's fishing-smack out there near the bar, waiting to come in with the flood. And, by Jove . . . they're trawling! I wonder what they can be trawling for."

Quick as lightning Nellie said, "Oh, George, wouldn't you like to go on board and have some fishing? It is such a little way over the bar, and I shouldn't be one bit ill—I am sure I should not!"

"Nellie, you're a brick! Thanks awfully, awfully! but——" He looked at Charlie.

Charlie instantly said, "There is not half the sea with an ebb tide there is with a flood. It is awfully calm now. We could row out in ten minutes. I say, George, we'll just lower the sail and row."

When George had actually hailed the fishing-smack, and was almost in the act of boarding her, he got a sudden fit of generosity, which sent a pang of fear through Nellie's heart.

"By Jove, but I'm an awfully selfish fellow!" cried he. "It's Charlie's last day, too, and Charlie is awfully fond of fishing. I say, old fellow, you go on board instead of me. I'll take Nellie home all safe."

Charlie refused this kind invitation with a promptitude which brought a blush into Nellie's fair cheek, and certainly was a relief to George's mind. At eighteen he loved fishing better than anything else on earth, except hunting. He said, "Awfully sorry to leave you both. Hope you don't think I'm awfully rude, Nellie; but you see it's my last day. Give you

my word of honour, if it wasn't my last day, wouldn't think of leaving you. I shan't have any fishing at that old fool of a crammer's!"

It never, even in the faintest manner, struck the excellent George that his companions were delighted to get rid of him.

Now so glad, so very glad were they at being once more alone together, that they actually felt a little troubled by their joy, and were made a little shy by it.

Nellie was steering. Charlie was rowing quickly back across the bar into the bay, and very quickly, for fear by any chance his cousin might change his mind. He and Eleanour sat face to face. Their eyes seemed to be always meeting. She wished to speak, and so did he. But for the first few minutes neither could think of anything to say.

Then George shouted across the water after them, "We can't get in till half flood. If I don't turn up at the rectory, say good-bye to Mr Newsham and the Bishop." He shouted twice over, "Say good-bye to Mr Newsham and the Bishop."

Nellie laughed at this. It was she who recovered her self-possession soonest. "George will not come to the rectory to-night," she said,—"you'll see he won't. He will dislike saying good-bye to Adela, for I really do think he is afraid of her; and it is so very, very funny!"

It was a relief to Charlie to be able to speak again, and here was a subject he could talk upon.

"I never saw two people so disagreeable together as George and Adela!" he exclaimed. "They were a horrid bore in the Dancer, and I used to feel quite uncomfortable with them. Now I never minded my father."

"Ah, no indeed! That would have been cruel!" said Nellie—"the dear old Admiral! I do love him!"

There was a moment's silence between them again. Then Charlie stopped rowing, and leant forward upon the crossed oars. He blushed because guilty of a feeling he was ashamed to own, and yet not cowardly enough to disown, and he said, "And yet, Nell, I think it has been . . . happier since my father went away and you and I have been so many days alone together."

She blushed too. Charlie had given expression to her own secret thought: she was ashamed to hear it spoken aloud in words; it was so cruel to the dear, kind Admiral! She did not know what to say, for she could only say exactly the real truth to Charlie.

"Nellie," he said, gravely, "I should like to go on boating with you every summer; not in the Dancer, but in this little gig, sailing when there is wind enough, and rowing when there is not, just we two together. It has been pleasant, Nell, these last few days. I wish it was the first of them and not the last!"

"Another year we shall be at Eastcourt in the summer," said Nellie. "I will never care for Eastcourt

so much again." And her voice was tender and sad. "I shall long for the sea and the fresh salt air. But we shall not come to Bluehaven any more," she sighed; "no, never more! It was only for grandpapa we came here now, and he will not be ill again. We shall never come here any more!"

"Then this may be the last time we shall be alone together," cried Charlie loudly, like one alarmed. "The last time, Nell! And the sun is getting very low, and we must soon go home."

"Not yet, not yet!" she said. "The sun is only just set now, and the evening lights stay long upon the water in these summer days. We do not dine till late. We need not go in yet! Put by the oars, for we do not want them, as we are drifting towards shore on the turning tide. We drift very quickly," she said pleadingly, "and there is no hurry, Charlie —there is none!"

The young man shipped the oars, and came in silence and sat by her side in the stern of the little boat. She blushed as she made room for him, but only said, "You could not see the sunset where you were, but you can see it now." And at her prompting, he looked across the shining water towards the west.

The sun had just gone down behind the low bank at the haven's mouth. The wet sand was full of colours, and no waves disturbed the reflection of the lazily drifting hooker near the bar. Soft and still bright lights were lingering in the sky and on the

sea. It was a calm and wellnigh cloudless sinking of the sun to rest, and was no gorgeous death with heaped clouds, like glittering armies flaunting gaudy colours in the sky. When the clouds have been very brilliantly decked in crimson and gold, and then, hurriedly casting off their colours, have closed in where the sun has been, with dark unmindfulness of its past light and life and joy, we feel as if that sun had died indeed, so clean forgotten, like this earth's dead, does it become; but when the lights of the after-glory, like brilliant hopes that will not die, linger in the sky and upon the water, and even on the darker land, until the moon is up and shining, we seem to feel the sleeping sun will surely rise again, and much sadness does not move our spirit. Yet in all beauty there is some tender pathos which makes the feeling it stirs within us akin to sorrow, like that joy in which are tears.

The vague emotion of nature's pathos touched, for the first time in their young life, the soul of the young man and of the girl by his side. It was a saddening dream that seemed to steal upon them, and blending with it came the tender shadow of their near parting. Charlie gently grasped Nellie's hand; and thus, hand in hand, they gazed silently upon the calm water, as young souls gaze out on life and think it stormless.

The evening was beautifully still, and there was no roar of the open sea beyond the haven's mouth; it was as if the wide waters were being hushed to sleep at sundown. The tide was far out, and no sound

upon the sand roughly caught the ear. The lovers listened mechanically for the noise they missed. You had to listen, or you did not hear that muffled moan of the drowsy waves, like the sighing of a tired man sinking to rest after the glare and labour and trouble of the day are past; you had to bend in hushed silence to hear the sleeper's breathing, so softly monotonous and low was it; and yet, while you listened, your ear turned drowsy and forgot the very sound it watched for, and heard quite distant voices more clearly than that dreamy dull monotony.

There is a sea-bird's cry—if, indeed, a sea-bird's it really is—and you hear it when the tide is out and the sun so far set that the lowing cows on shore have gone to rest, and all sounds except that breathing of a calm sea upon the sand are hushed. From the distance where it ever seems to be, that sadly thrilling note will come, and other far-off cries will then awake and answer to its plaintive voice.

The lovers, silently drifting on the turning tide, heard that weird, melancholy note, and the answering cries.

"Those are the voices of the poor drowned people," said Nellie, in a dream-like tone, still gazing out to sea with solemn, tearful eyes—"the voices of the dead men lost at sea, and never, never found again."

Charlie came back from dreamland when he heard her speak.

"Yes, those are the voices of the drowned men begging with all their heart and soul not to be

forgotten at home. The dead," said he, indignantly, sitting straight up—"the dead are so soon forgotten! Why, when old Rullock's only son was lost at sea, the girl he was engaged to in that village there"—he dropped Nellie's hand, and pointed angrily towards Bluehaven—"that girl married another man before the year was out!"

"I hate that woman!" cried Nellie, passion trembling in her voice; and her voice was like her eyes, it moved your heart.

"You would not forget me, even if I died!" said Charlie with strong emotion, bending over her. "You will not forget me if I am a long time away? And to be a long, long time away, is just like death."

Their hands were clasped again.

"It is like death," she said; "but I will not forget you, Charlie."

"Say that again, dear Nell; say it once more," he whispered, gently pleading, and still bending low to her.

"I never will forget you, Charlie! I never can forget you! You know I never can!" Her trembling voice was low like his, and seemed to speak her words into the inmost sanctuary of his heart like a holy vow.

A silence which breathed with emotion, like the calm sea breathing in the hushed twilight on the shore, laid its soft spell upon them.

When the young man spoke again, his voice was still low, as if he feared to scare away the sacred joy he felt.

"When I am old enough, dear Nell, you and I will marry, and never part again. If I go to India, you must come too; and we will never part, except in actual war; and even then, we need not part for long, unless I am killed. The very day I get into the army, the moment I see my name in the list of passed, I will come and ask you before them all to marry me. I will come even if my name is last on the list, and everybody thinks I am a dunce—I will come all the same, though I should like to come as the first fellow out. But," looking at her very tenderly, "I know if others are ashamed of me, you will never be. You won't care, Nellie? you won't? will you?"

The answer came with a passionate warmth that pleased him much.

"I care? Oh, Charlie! if every one said unkind things of you, and was ashamed of you, then I would love you best!" And she added, with a long-drawn sigh, "If you were too clever, too good, I might be afraid of you. I should feel you were like mamma."

The hand that was on hers was drawn away, and the hushed voice grew loud.

"And if you were afraid of me as you are of her, you . . . Nellie, you would not tell me the truth!"

"The truth!" she cried aloud, astounded; "I never tell a lie!" and large tears filled her eyes.

"Yet you all seem to me to act lies," said Charlie, hardly. "When your mother asks you to do something you dislike, and your father something you like, you say *Yes* to her and *No* to him."

Eleanour blushed guiltily at this.

"You have no mother, and you are not afraid of the dear, kind Admiral," she said. "Charlie," she pleaded, "you do not know, you cannot understand——"

"Yes, I do. Fellows at school know it is often difficult enough to tell the truth." He was still unsoftened. "I know what will happen," he exclaimed, angrily. "When I come to ask you to be my wife, you will look at your mother, and she will look at you, and then you will say *No.*"

Nellie turned pale.

"Ask me when my father is by; don't ask me when she is there."

Charlie grew pale like her. He drew back from her, and looked her full in the face. "Nellie," he said, "you are a coward!"

The voice in which he said this was terrible to her ear. She trembled all over, and seizing his withdrawn hand, cried out in great grief, "Have pity on me, Charlie! have pity on poor Nellie!" and burst into tears.

He was strangely moved to see her cry; it was as if for the first time in his life he had seen a woman weep. In a voice of pained tenderness he said, drawing near to her again, "Oh! don't cry, Nell! don't cry!" But she only cried the more because his voice was kind. "I was cruel, cruel to you, Nell! Forgive me, Nell!" And he took his own rather rough handkerchief and dried her eyes, smiling at her, till

at last she smiled at him. Her hat had fallen back, and for a moment the white brow, with the pretty dark curls dancing on it, tempted the boy with a wish to kiss it, as he used to do in simple childhood, not so very long ago; so he bent down towards her, then quickly drew back again, with a cold look which frightened her tears quite, quite away, because she did not understand it.

He had said to himself, "No; we are not children any more. I am a man—a gentleman; and a gentleman does not kiss a lady until she is promised to him before all the world as his wife." Charles Crofton had exalted ideas of honour and of love.

Nellie, in puzzled dread, gave a meaning to his sudden coldness which made her heart beat with a new terror. "You are going away, Charlie!" she cried. "And at Eton you will be working and boating or cricketing all day, and you will not have much time to think of me; and then later on you will be in a fright about the examination, and you will have no time at all to think of me, and I will be always thinking of you." She turned white again through fear. "Perhaps," she said, "you will forget me."

Then he swore to her, as she had sworn to him, that he never, never would forget her; and as he had made her repeat the vow twice over, so she made him—not because she distrusted Charlie, but because she liked to hear him say the pleasant words again.

"Nellie, the lights are fading quite away and the

moon is not yet risen. It is getting very dark near shore; we must row home."

"We must!" she sighed.

But near the shore he ceased to row, and said, "I will not go to the rectory this evening, Nell. I should have to say good-bye to you, and I could not bear to say good-bye with Adela and the Bishop and your father standing round and watching us. You would cry, Nellie." He paused, bent forward, and added gently, "We need not say good-bye at all, dear Nell,"—for he greatly feared her tears. "There is no need to say good-bye, dear Nell."

"No, no!" she whispered back again, and tried to smile; yet her voice was like a sob, and thrilled him painfully. "No, no! We will not say good-bye, for fear . . . for fear we should not meet again!"

CHAPTER XI.

"ONE thing I know," said the man in the Gospel, the darkness of whose eyes was turned into light by the touch of the Divine hand—"one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

The dark, unmindful sleep which clings like blindness to the heart and eyes of childhood and of youth, when first divinely touched by a pure and holy love, awakes to the sense of beauty as to a new world; for love is the great revealer of all beauty that can be felt.

It is awaking love makes music to be full of touching dreams; and poetry no dead art of rhetoric, but a real and living power stirring the rising spirit within you, like a dead man from his grave; and by its craving need of perfect satisfaction, love brings into the soul the longing for the ideal, and so makes you to feel the ecstasy which has found expression in the painter's art, and even has put life into cold marble.

But strangest mystery of unawakened sleep! You may have lived for years beneath the ever-changing lights and cloudy shadows of the sky, and seen the

colour-giving sun each day, and the moon by night, shining amidst the darkened trees or dreaming on the water, and never, never once have felt in your cold heart the pathos of this earth's loveliness, or seen with your hard eyes its moving beauty.

Yet when the Divine hand does touch your soul, having been blind from birth, you see.

The full awakening had come to Nellie while drifting on the calm water, hand in hand with him she loved. She had then felt the thrilling stillness of the evening hour, and her opening, tearful eyes had seen the lingering lights fading from the sea and land, like tender spirits which part with fond regret, and in her soul she had felt their beauty.

It was a shock to her to come back again into ordinary, unideal life, as it ever is when, heaven-rapt, we turn from gazing on the ideal and see quite close to us some homely, common thing.

How long the dreary evening was! How stupid her grandfather the good Bishop looked dozing in an arm-chair, whilst her excellent dull father read aloud in a drowsy voice tiresome bits out of that humdrum temperance lecture he seemed now to be eternally preparing for the fishermen. And oh, how coldly dead to passion and to sympathy the placid Adela appeared as she calmly followed, stitch by stitch, a traced-out pattern in crewel-work! She never made a wrong stitch; her fingers always went exactly at the same slow, steady pace. Relieved from George, she looked quite happy.

Yet Eleanour liked better to see the Bishop doze and to hear her father droning him into a real, sound sleep, than she would have liked him to awake and wish to play some game; for then they must all—her grandfather, Adela, and even her father—they must all have discovered she had no mind, no memory, for stupid cards and stupid counters, and they would have wondered at her.

"But why," thought she, with feverish remorse—"why were Charlie and I so foolish as to dread to meet again — and merely because others might be present? We need not have said good-bye at all." And then the thought came passionately to her. "It would have been better even to have said good-bye, and good-bye before all the world, than to have lost these last few hours. And it may be so long before we meet again—it may be so long! Yet perhaps—perhaps he will change his mind and come down to the rectory, as he has done each night till now." So at every little sound she gave a start, and thought it might be his knock or his footstep that she heard; but as each throbbing hope turned cold and fell like lead from her heart, the craving remorse within her grew apace.

"The moon is shining brightly now. It is as light as day. Adela," she said, "I will go out—I must go out! It is so close and stuffy here. Hush, hush, Adela! for grandpapa is quite asleep, and my father is dozing now. I will go out for a few short minutes, only for a few,—just to breathe and to see the moonlight on the water."

"Then I certainly won't go with you," said Adela, very decidedly. "I have no notion of catching cold the night before mamma comes home. Mamma does not like sick people, and she will be very angry with you, Nellie, if you are ill."

But Nellie had already gone from the close little study in which they were all sitting into the small dining-room. She had opened the window, and Adela could see her springing from the low window-sill to the ground, and then disappearing in the bushes close by.

"Those bushes must be damp with dew," thought Adela; "but Nellie always was silly, and she always will be silly; and she never understands what makes mamma angry, though she is so very, very much afraid of her. And now I really do declare Nellie has left that window open, and she could have shut it quite easily from the outside! But she has forgotten it; she is always forgetting everything now—not that she ever had a good memory. Dear me, dear me, it really is most provoking! for there I must get up and shut that window, or grandpapa and papa and I myself will certainly catch cold. Such a bother!" she thought, as she laid down her crewel-work on the table and carefully placed each different coloured skein of wool by itself. "Such a bother! I do wish Nellie was as sensible as I am! And she will cry her eyes out when mamma scolds her for catching cold."

The one field belonging to the rectory was only separated from the few bushes and little enclosure round the house by a ditch and grass bank. The

open field climbed steeply up the hillside to the Look-out. At its highest point it touched the wall of the semaphore and cottage, and then fell suddenly downwards, skirting that little narrow strip of sheltered tamarisk-bushes under the lee side of the cliff and semaphore, which the Admiral called his shrubbery.

The night air had been freshened by the evening's dew; it was cool and pleasant to a fevered brow. And the stillness of the white unclouded moonlight was calmly soothing.

"I will climb the hill," thought Nellie, "until I see the moon upon the water. I cannot see it here."

And when she had gone some way farther up—"I can see it a little now, but if I climb still higher I shall see the moon shining over the haven's mouth and out to sea." On she went faster and faster. Suddenly she stopped. She started at her own long shadow, for it was so tall, it might have been a man's.

"I thought . . ." She stood quite still. Then in terror asked herself, "Where am I really going? . . . I know. I did not know till this moment; but I know now. I know whom it is I hope to meet!"

She ran a few steps down the hill; then stopped again; then looked back at the cottage, which was so near, its shadow almost touched her feet. "How near, how near I am to Charlie! Yes; he is in there. He is close by."

All sounds were sleeping in the moonlight, and so still was it that she could hear her own quick breath-

ing and the rustling of her dress. "I am very near to him," she thought; "and all is still—most strangely still! much stiller than by day. He . . . he could hear me if I called." She went a few steps nearer. "Yes, Charlie could hear—he could hear me if I called! And we might say good-bye—just one, one short good-bye! for we were cowards not to have said a last good-bye! And the time may be so long, so long before we meet again! I feel that I now could say good-bye to him without a tear; and it was my tears, it was only my weak tears he dreaded. If he had not feared them, we might have said a last good-bye."

She listened; and when we listen in the night, the stillness seems to deepen. "There is no sound, only the moan of the far-off sea. Certainly he would hear me now . . . he would hear! . . . Charlie!" she cried aloud with sudden, daring courage. And then she heard her own voice echoing with terrifying clearness in the silence of the night—that awful silence when all seems dead but our own soul, which lives with an intensity of life we never feel by day. Terror-struck, she listened motionless, like a ghost, to a voice that was too real, too human, to have been her own.

What was that sound? There was a sound! "Where can I run to? Where can I hide? There is no shadow in the open field but mine." And so, like a frightened bird that flies into the danger it would escape, she sought quick shelter in the shadow of the cottage; then felt afraid to be so near

to Charlie; and listening, she thought she heard the sound again; and she crept with a beating heart over the low bank where it was still in shade, and then along the ditch under the wall of the semaphore, till she found a gap leading into the Admiral's shrubbery. She knew now where she would hide. At first she had meant only to skirt the shrubbery, and then follow the dry ditch under the grass bank, for it went all round the field, and would soon have taken her home. But now she thought she would go to the rustic seat which overlooked the cliff underneath the semaphore and at the other side of the little grove: she would have all the darkness of those bushes like a black cloak between her and Charlie, and she would wait there a little just to listen once again and know if she had really heard a sound or not. If she waited there a short time—it need only be a few minutes—Charlie would have gone in again,—if he had come out! That is what she really wished to know—if he had ever come out! If he had, he would soon go in when he could see no one; and then she could walk home across the open field, for she had felt frightened in that dark ditch; there might be some one hidden there. A robber! a murderer lying in wait to do some horrid deed! At this thought, she felt afraid even of the tamarisk-bushes around her. She looked; she thought they moved! and flew along the short path to the small open space on the cliff-side beyond. As she ran, she heard quick footsteps running amongst the moving bushes, for indeed they

moved! She stopped and turned cold in terror of those footsteps that were behind her. She listened eagerly. They too had stopped.

The footsteps must have been her own; and yet she was afraid to walk on again, though she was no longer amongst the bushes, but out beyond them in the open moonlight. At last she took heart, for she felt, if only she could reach that seat, she might sit quite quiet till all her courage came back to her again, as the rustic bench was at least some ten yards distant from the horrid darkness of the tamarisk grove. So she walked a few steps forward; then stopped; then walked again; then stopped once more, so as to make quite, quite sure there were no footsteps in that wood and only hers beyond.

The black bushes were on her right side, and the water and the moonlight on her left, as she went those halting steps up the cliff. The moon, which lighted the sky above and made the stars turn pale, fell like a single silver streak upon the water; and Nellie saw a fishing-boat sail across the moonbeam, like a spirit born out of the shade to live a little while in light, and die into the shade again.

"The moonlight lies only on one long ripple of the water, and there is shadow at each side," thought Nellie, for she had been in much blindness towards nature until now. "I am looking up the full light here, but when I get to the rustic bench, I shall look into the shadow." Then, as she moved, she saw the light move on the water; she stopped, and it stopped

too; and she was filled with awe, for it was as if the eye of God were looking out of heaven across the water to follow her own soul on earth — not every man's and every woman's, but only her own soul.

Having reached the rustic seat, she sat very still in the moonlight: it no longer moved, but rested calmly before her across the haven and out on the distant sea; and the awe of the dread feeling was upon her mind.

Oh how beautiful, how beautiful, like a still vision of heaven, is the moonlight dreaming on the water! Its dream is holy, and most touching in its peace! The stillness is like placid death when the anguish of the last farewell is past; and so pale, so cold, so moving to our soul is it, like death.

As Nellie, wrapped in feeling more than thought, sat gazing out to sea and up to heaven, a tall figure stood where the path broke from the dark bushes into the moonlight. The young man watched her. He was irresolute; he moved and seemed to go; he turned, and again he watched her; he stood very still and watched her. Then once more he turned to go, and there was a slight rustling in the silence of the night.

Eleanour started up with a loud cry, but, having stared an anxious moment, exclaimed calmly enough, "Oh, George, how you did frighten me! You frightened me most dreadfully! I never, never dreamt it could be you." And she was coming towards him, quietly picking her footsteps down the cliff, and think-

ing as she came, "Perhaps the fishing-boat I saw sailing over the moonbeam and out to sea had landed George down in Bluehaven on the pier; and now he is going home by the short path up the cliff and through the shrubbery. I will walk with him through the darkness of the grove, for I am afraid to go alone."

She was getting very near to him, when she stopped and called out in a trembling voice, "George, George, don't stand in that half shadow! Come quite out into the light, or you will frighten me again, though I know those are your coat and hat! I know they are not——" The figure stood quite still. Suddenly she started back and gave another cry, "Charlie!"

He walked rapidly forwards. They all but met. Just touching her—and she had felt his touch—he drew coldly back. "Oh, Nellie, Nellie!" he said; and there was reproach in his voice.

Her heart stood still. It was as if she had met the spirit of her lost love in the pale light beyond the grave, and found him sad, unreal, and strange. It seemed as if she could not be on earth, but must have died and met him cold in death before her own heart was as cold, as dead as his.

She bowed her head and clasped her hands. Then, motionless, she looked, standing out in the moonlight with the pale water beyond her, like a white statue mourning on the cliff in tearless woe for the lovers lost at sea.

Charlie kept far from her, and she had turned to stone.

At last he whispered in an odd, changed voice, and the whisper was heard in the great stillness, "You called me, Nellie."

It is said life comes back to the drowning man, not as a pleasant joy, but like a rushing pain in every vein, and such were these words to Nellie; they made her live to painful shame.

"You heard me, Charlie!" she said; and it was she who now turned away from him.

Once more he seemed irresolute whether to go or stay. But she thought she heard his footsteps leaving her, and suddenly she raised her head, looked round, forgot all else, and, with outstretched hands, she cried, "I called you, Charlie, to say a last good-bye; I can say it now without a tear."

He came to meet her stretched-out hands, because they moved him more than he could bear; it was not coldness kept him far from her, but a sort of fear. When their hands had met, he gently said to her, as if he thought he had been cruel, "Why, Nellie, it was you who said, 'No, no, we will not say good-bye, for fear we should not meet again.' You said this, Nell—you did indeed, dear Nell! and I felt that you were right."

His kind voice thrilled her as his touch had done. She could not speak, but trembling, stood before him with a hand in each of his and downcast eyes. Her silence moved him as if it had been touching speech. "Dear Nell, we shall soon meet again," he said.

The drooping lids still veiled her eyes, but her

voice came back to her with the sound of stifled tears in it.

"Often and often when people part," she said, "they never meet again." Then driving back her tears with one great effort, cried, "So good-bye, Charlie, good-bye, good-bye!" But the strain was too much for her weakness, and a loud sob overmastered her. Charlie was powerfully shaken by her grief; he was moved just as he had feared to be.

The sobbing Nellie could hardly stand, so he put his arm around her to support her, and she, following as she was ever wont to do, the strong feeling of the moment and none other, laid her pretty head upon his shoulder. Then he bent towards her, softly comforting her and saying kind words more tender than he had ever meant to say. The passion he felt within her, and once had dreaded, was now arousing a like passion in himself.

At last Nellie sobbed no more. She was quite stilled by some new feeling, and he was stilled like her. There was solemn silence all around them in the moonlight. Nellie softly moved. She raised her pathetic eyes to his with such a longing in them that he yielded to the wish in her heart as if he had never fought against the desire in his own. He bent a little lower, and kissed her fair young forehead; and having kissed it once, he passionately kissed it twice again.

Then hand in hand, without another word, they walked through the shadow of the little wood.

When they came to the gap leading out into the open field, Nellie suddenly remembered George, then remembered Adela, and the servants who might be watching her, and felt as if the very night were full of eyes. She hastily drew her hand away from Charlie's. He stood still and looked at her. "Nellie," he said, and his changed voice was rather stern, "we have walked hand in hand through the darkness of the wood, and so we will walk in that same way in the light."

And he took her trembling hand in his. She did not dare to say to him, "Let us go round in the shadow of the ditch."

Charlie went boldly into the open field, where it was as light as day. The whole world might see them.

They again walked on in silence. From time to time she felt him look at her, and when he looked, Nellie remembered it was that very day, only a few hours ago, he had called her a coward.

There was a sort of remorse in Charlie's heart as he gazed at the beautiful young girl beside him. She looked to him, in the weird pallor of the moonlight, like an angel come down to earth; and he was sorry that his lips had ever touched what was to him a holy thing not really his to touch. He felt wounded by his own act, in that romantically high and chivalrous sense of honour on which he prided himself. Neither Charles Crofton nor his father were quite like all other ordinary men; there was a very holy spirit in both their hearts.

Self-reproach made Charlie a little stern and even

cold when he said what was really the last good-bye to Nellie. He frightened her; she wished to heaven they had parted in the tamarisk grove before he had changed to her; and never, never could she forget the cold pang of that moment!

Charlie did not stand in the shade of the bushes inside the rector's garden, but right out in the full moonlight, and he said his cold good-bye and quickly turned to go, then turned back again. Nellie's heart leapt within her; but he did not come near to her, and only said in that altered voice of his, "Should they ask you if you were alone, say that I was with you. If they have seen me, but are not sure, say it was really me they saw; not George or anybody else, but me." To this he added peremptorily, "Go in, Nellie; it is late—too late for you."

Chilled to the heart, and feeling vaguely guilty, Nellie stood by the low window-sill, feebly trying to lift the sash noiselessly, for she feared to wake the stillness which was inside. Charlie stood on the grass-bank and watched her. Suddenly, in one bound, he was by her side. He threw up the window, and Nellie turned faint at the loud creak it gave. Charles Crofton went boldly in.

He awoke the good Bishop from a very sound sleep, for the soft relaxing climate of Bluehaven, and perhaps, too, the hazy atmosphere of the excellent Thomas's mind, undoubtedly made the Bishop much drowsier than he was wont to be in the more bracing and controversially exciting air of his own diocese.

The dozing Thomas also returned, but after his own dreamy fashion, to the doubtful realities of life. When occupied with one of his temperance lectures, or with the speech he intended to make in Parliament, Thomas was apt to be very absent-minded indeed. He now seemed quite unaware he had been dozing, and sitting up, instantly began reading out from the manuscript he still held in his hand. He was dimly conscious of having missed a line or two, but not enough so to stop and consider the matter.

"Good-bye," said Charlie, and his voice interrupted Mr Newsham. "I am off the first thing to-morrow morning, long before any of you are up."

"Ah! Good-bye, my dear boy, good-bye," said the kind old Bishop, waking up sufficiently to give him a very cordial invitation to spend the Christmas holidays at the palace. Then, as if waking up entirely —"I am afraid you had rather a dull evening of it, Charlie; for now I really do declare I have been fast asleep;" and he laughed at the astonishing discovery. "And I wonder, Thomas," said he, slyly, "if you have been dozing a little, too? Eh?—eh? I hardly think you can have been reading to me all the time."

But Thomas evidently thought he had. "I have nearly finished now," he answered, gravely; and then turning, in that curiously open-eyed, yet really sightless, absent way of his, to Charlie, he said very seriously, "Charlie, as you have heard so much, I wish you would just stay and hear the end. The end is the most im-

pressive part." He looked down rather less absently at the written lecture. "Yes, yes, yes"—he often said, Yes, yes, yes. "Yes, yes, yes; I am quite right—yes, yes. The end is the most impressive part; for I have kept that story of the man who killed his six children, and——" He looked down again. "Yes, yes, he did kill his wife too. I thought so; but I like to be quite accurate—quite accurate. He killed her and the children and himself in a fit of *delirium tremens*."

It was perfectly clear that both Thomas and the Bishop were under the impression Charlie had spent the evening at the rectory just the same as usual. Nellie took heart. She had slunk in behind Charlie unobserved. Her absence had been quite unnoticed by the two dozing old gentlemen. And as to Adela, her whole mind now was taken up with the disagreeable thought, "Is George coming too?" For she had got a start when Charlie appeared at the window, still wearing George's hat and coat.

Thomas, shaking his head, kept repeating absently, "Yes, yes, he did kill them all—yes, yes, yes."

The Bishop was yawning. Thomas seemed, of a sudden, to be almost really awake. "Octavius," he said. He frequently called his father-in-law by his Christian name, especially when in an absent mood, for he had done so in the intimacy of old days, when the Canon was Rector of Yellowmead and Clara still seemed a young child. "Octavius, if you would only follow my example, and join the total abstainers, your

sphere of usefulness would be much larger than mine. A noble field! Yes, yes, yes—a noble field of usefulness! And," he added, getting much more lively, —" and if you took the pledge, Bishop, publicly in your own cathedral—yes, yes, that would be the place—in your own cathedral, right in the face, perhaps in the teeth, of your whole diocese, you could insist on all your clergy doing the same. You would have the right to insist then—yes, you would have the right." Thomas waxed eloquent. " All your clergy—yes, yes, all would be forced to take the pledge. In every parish you would have one total abstainer, and in most the curate and the whole rectory too. Your clergy could not refuse—no, no, they could not—no, no, no. What a glorious, glorious prospect for the diocese, Bishop!" Thomas was quite enthusiastic. " And you are such a very moderate man, Octavius, that you might just as well take the pledge as not, for you live almost as if you had taken it—yes, yes, you do. And that is what provokes me!" he exclaimed, warmly—" that's what provokes me!"

The Bishop always brightened to a discussion. He gave Thomas some quiet, sensible reasons for not taking the pledge himself in his own cathedral, and very cogent ones for not insisting, like a tyrannical schoolmaster, on all his clergy becoming total abstainers. The great majority of the bishops of the Church of England have not hitherto been wanting in commonsense. It is to be hoped that, with advancing liturgies and ideas, and new crosiers and new clothes, they

will not cast away common-sense as too vulgar and too English for the road to Rome.

"And, Thomas," said the Bishop reverently, in a lower tone—he pushed his chair nearer to his adversary's—"and, Thomas, I cannot forget that the first miracle performed on earth by my Lord and Master was the turning of water into good wine—ay, and when the guests had already partaken of some other sort of wine. There was once a moment—I will allow it—when horror of the wicked drinking there is amongst a certain number—yet only a certain number—of English men and women made me wish to forget this fact. But it is my duty to remember it—my bounden, sacred duty to remember that, in moderation—that is the point—in moderation"—he laid great stress on the word—"in moderation, wine has not been forbidden to man. And who am I that I should dare to call a sin what my Saviour made no sin? Who am I that I should stand forth at the marriage feast and say to my Lord and Master, You did wrong to turn the water into wine?"

Thomas shook his head angrily and gave an irritable wave of his hand. But the Bishop, dropping his voice still lower, went on: "Thomas, it was not water, it was wine the Lord consecrated with bread at the Last Supper." Mr Newsham's nervous agitation of manner increased, and he was going to speak. However, the Bishop, as if a new idea were striking him, gave a quiet sort of smile—it was really a very harmless little one, and more like a soft ray of benevolence on

the good man's simple kindly face than a real smile, yet somehow it irritated Thomas. The Bishop, slightly raising his voice, said: "St Paul,"—now was it not only natural that the divine who was always writing so much and so ably about St Paul, should smile in a kind of fatherly, loving way when he mentioned his chosen apostle?—"if I mistake not"—as if the good Bishop could be mistaken about St Paul!—"Thomas, if I mistake not, St Paul, in his Epistle to Timothy, actually went so far as to write, 'Drink no longer water, but use a little wine——'"

The Bishop was not allowed to finish the quotation. With a look of triumph in his large, now glittering eyes, and a kind of eager, childlike delight, Thomas exclaimed, as if clinching the argument for ever and for ever, "Yes, yes! Drink a little wine! and why, why? 'For thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.' Yes, yes, yes! 'for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities,'" he repeated excitedly in a state of really glorious elation. "And, Bishop, you never seem to be aware that we, *we* permit wine for infirmities and the stomach's sake. Like St Paul, we can permit it for the stomach's sake. If *you* had taken our pledge, and taken it even in your own cathedral—yes, yes, yes! in your own cathedral!" How Thomas loved that brilliant idea of his own invention! "Why, Bishop, if you had actually taken our pledge, and even taken it openly before your whole diocese in your own cathedral, you would still be allowed to take wine for your stomach's sake." Thomas was very trium-

phant. "We should permit a doctor to order you wine if you were ill——" he hesitated, and added, "seriously ill, as Timothy must have been. I am sure Timothy was very, very seriously ill. So if you were seriously ill, any doctor might order you wine. A doctor might even order me wine"—another pause —"though I wouldn't take it!" he avowed, for he was a very truthful man. "But, Bishop, Dr Fozzle could order you wine to-morrow if you had taken our pledge. He could order it to you just as St Paul ordered it to Timothy—for his infirmities. Mark this! for his often infirmities and his stomach's sake. St Paul wrote that just as a doctor might write a prescription to-day, and our pledge would not have stood in St Paul's way. No, no, no! it would not; for St Paul wrote as a doctor."

"Yet," remarked the Bishop, "St Paul was no physician like St Luke. I doubt," he added reflectively, and speaking more to his own speculative theological self than to Thomas—"I doubt if St Luke, being a physician, would have ordered wine to the sick in the exciting climate of the East." The Bishop was very learned on the climate of the East, as it must have been in the old days, and is now. "It was not St Luke, but St Paul, and he was no physician, who told Timothy to take wine."

But Thomas was getting very absent-minded again, and not really listening at all. "Yes, yes, yes! take a little wine, Timothy, for thy stomach's sake," he was repeating—"for thy stomach's sake and thine often

infirmities. Exactly, exactly!" He kept musing aloud on the idea, "thy stomach's sake and thine often—yes, yes, yes! thine often infirmities."

Thomas was an enthusiast, absolutely without the sense of the ridiculous. But the Bishop had a perception of the humorous; and Timothy's often infirmities and his stomach's sake, his stomach's sake, which was becoming quite an absent trick of repetition with the excellent Thomas, struck the Right Reverend mind as being uncomfortably funny. The Bishop glanced quickly, nervously round the room. He wished to be very grave, but felt as if he were going to be seized with laughter then and there before the young people, whose presence he had for a moment forgotten, and vividly remembered now. They had surely been listening to the discussion and had heard the quotation of Holy Scripture, and the Bishop much desired to set them an example of reverent demeanour. For the first, and perhaps only, time in his life, he felt relieved to see the congregation was paying no attention whatever to him or his words. I say *congregation*, because I think a Bishop, and even a rector of a certain standing, if he is talking wisely and two or three people are in the room, does feel, from long habit, that they must be a sort of congregation necessarily hanging on his words.

Charlie was in the very act of going away. He had one foot on the low sill of the window in the adjoining room—the window by which he had entered. Adela's hand was on his arm detaining him—she

appeared to be pressing him to take a woollen comforter, which he seemed to be rather irritably refusing.

Eleanour was standing perfectly still in the low archway dividing the two rooms—if, indeed, that could be called a division which really was none.

Nellie alone, from her attitude, might have been listening; but her face, as the Bishop saw, was turned away from him and not towards him, and when he spoke she started round with a scared look. The moonlight filled that room, and the Bishop thought it was the pale moonlight which made her face seem white and stony.

The Bishop's kind heart smote him—"Charlie," he called out hastily, rising from his chair with outstretched hand—"Charlie, you are off! and whilst we two elderly people have been arguing, we had almost let you go without a word. But, my dear boy, must you really start so very early to-morrow morning?" Charlie stepped down, but did not move to meet the Bishop, who was coming across the room towards him. He kept standing by the open window. Had he walked even a few steps forward, he would have been quite close to Nellie.

"Harper says we must leave the very first thing in the morning, as soon as ever it is light," said Charlie quietly, but to Nellie's ear he spoke in his hard and altered voice. "Harper says one of the carriage-springs is half broken, and he has settled with the coachmaker near the station to have it put right before Mrs Newsham's train arrives. Mrs Newsham is to come at

two o'clock, and Harper says she must not be kept a minute waiting."

At the mention of his wife's name, Thomas looked up, then looked about him, and by the time Charlie had finished speaking, he was clearly returning from Timothy's often infirmities to the realities of present life. "Yes, yes, yes!" he began; and then getting still more awake, said seriously, as if suddenly much concerned, "Charlie, you must not keep her waiting, and George——George? Why——" looking about again, "George? George is not here. He is gone!" And he seemed much surprised, then said anxiously, "But George won't keep her waiting;" then coaxingly, "Charlie, I can depend on you—yes, yes, yes! I can depend on you to be in time; and on George—on George too! Good boys! good boys!" he exclaimed reflectively, beginning to get a little absent again.

"George has not been here this evening," said the Bishop, though, if the truth be told, what between dozing and arguing, he had only just realised the fact. "But I am sure he will come down to say good-bye. Why, here he is coming now, I declare!" he said, looking through the window up across the open field towards the semaphore.

Adela did not even stop to look. In a moment she was gone! Her departure was unnoticed. Nellie saw no one but Charlie, and listened to no voice but his. She was trying to bear, in tearless silence, the deadly chill of the parting which at last had been so cold, and was not really ended yet, for still while he stayed

the pain of the long parting lingered on. She felt an oppressive suffocation of all joy, like the trance of nightmare when the pleasant dream has fled.

Charlie was looking out for George at the window with the Bishop.

Thomas was getting up from his chair and coming to look also. "George? He must not keep Clara waiting. No, no, no! he must not keep her waiting."

"But George is not there," said Charlie; "and I know he does not mean to come. He has been out fishing with young Tom Bracer, and he is packing now. He told me to say good-bye for him to you, my lord, and to you, Mr Newsham."

The Bishop had rubbed his glasses and had put them on. "Is . . . is it possible?" he exclaimed. "Why, I do believe it is the Admiral's flagstaff I have mistaken for George!" And the Bishop laughed much, but in his own mild way, at this.

The joke had to be explained by Charlie to Mr Newsham. When the hazy Thomas finally understood it, he laughed with all his heart, and laughed and laughed again. Thomas was like many worthy people who have no constant sense of the ridiculous: if a joke, even the very smallest one, did by accident get inside him, it made a curious and a long commotion there.

So it was in the midst of laughter that Charlie said good-bye to the Bishop and Mr Newsham. He had to walk a few steps forward in order to shake hands with Thomas, who stood in one place and laughed.

He came very near to Nellie then. Her heart stopped beating. As death is the outcome of a living agony, so there is a deadly coldness following too much intensity of life. No marble ever looked more cold than Nellie. He just touched her hand;—it was like ice.

"I have been cold to her. I was first cold to her; now she is cold to me." And Charlie went away with a chilled heart.

Thomas and the Bishop, still laughing each after his own fashion, went back to the two arm-chairs. Nellie stood motionless in the low doorway and saw Charlie go, and saw him stand on the grass-bank and look back. And then she saw him stop in the open field, where she knew he could see into the house and see her still; and again he looked back, but she gave no sign of life.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

PERFECT matchmaking requires experience and practice, particularly practice. Great natural aptitude, though absolutely necessary, is not alone sufficient for so intricate an art. Clara was forced to acknowledge this, and felt she had perhaps a little—just a little—overdone her part of being against that match between George and Adela.

Sir Cuthbert was very ill. His life was in danger. Clara softened her tactics, and turned from the angry mother into the sympathetic one forced against her will to open Adela's young eyes. She ceased to scold her daughter, and explained to her quite tenderly the real meaning of George's odd behaviour. He was cold, she said, because he feared to be too warm, for a very young man is shy of betraying his love, and invariably seems to avoid the girl he admires. Clara told Adela plainly that George was in love with her. Plain-speaking was necessary with Adela, because she really could not take a hint.

"From what you tell me, Adela," said Clara, "George avoided you in the most marked manner at Bluehaven.

No open attentions could have had a clearer meaning. Had he paid you open attention, I should have thought nothing of his conduct. I should have considered the whole matter as a little silly boyish flirtation not worth a moment's thought. But it is George's marked avoidance of you, Adela, which shows conclusively that he is in love with you. He liked you so much, my dear, that he was afraid to speak to you; and what proves it is that he never avoided Nellie. Why should he not have treated you exactly as he treated Nellie?"

"Nellie is not grown up," promptly replied Adela.

Clara was rather taken aback by this answer. There was a prompt decision about Adela which annoyed her very much at times. As yet she had not found it the very easy task she had expected to make Adela believe George was in love with her at Bluehaven, "though very likely without his knowing it," she had prudently added. It was much easier to make Adela fancy she must be in love with George than George with her, because the poor child had been made to feel so awkward and uncomfortable and unlike her stolid self in George's presence, that the curious feeling did require some explanation. But Adela's imagination was slow, and Clara soon saw her heart could not be made to take fire, as many a girl's has done, through the power of the imagination.

However, little difficulties only brightened Mrs Newsham's mind. This extremely clever woman was by no means wanting in resource; and so, finding Adela's heart and imagination were torpid, she touched

her vanity. That chord, so sensitive in woman, vibrated to her hand with a throbbing life startling in a dull girl like Adela.

From that moment Clara felt she could do what she liked with her daughter.

It was very pleasant to the young girl to be told she was pretty—so pretty that it was from her fair face the abashed George had run away, though it made her blush to hear this, and even to think of it. When quite alone with locked door, she shyly smiled back at the smiling, blushing maiden she saw in the looking-glass, and now liked to watch in more attitudes than one. Adela had always been pleasantly satisfied with her own appearance, just as she had been with everything else belonging to her. She had always been sure she was good and very sensible, and quite as clever as any one need ever wish to be.

All Adela's talent was of the practical sort, and that is the one kind which makes people happy, for it easily brings them perfect satisfaction. A practical housewife can be the best satisfied woman on earth. And I can well imagine a carpenter—especially an amateur carpenter, as he would feel cleverer than a real one—absolutely content with life. A chest of drawers is a finished work which can be perfect in its way. You will nearly always see persons of practical talent cheerfully well satisfied — the vanity within them, as within us all, seems pleased, and they are quite happily conceited. Intellectual talent, especially the imaginative or artistic, has but meagre satisfaction

in it unless there be so little as scarcely to deserve the name, or so much that it can reach to the power and full satisfaction of genius. But genius is a name men take in vain; it hardly does exist on earth; so rare is it that it should not be taken into account. I think it a terribly sad fact that there is no satisfaction for the soul—no sense of perfection, even touched afar with outstretched hand, like the hem of the divine garment grasped one instant in a lifetime—for those whose talent is more than just a little, and yet not half, not half enough! For them there can be no abiding joy.

Practical persons undervalue, and, as a rule, dislike the imaginative artistic ones; and these, on their part, are apt to underrate the practical people. But it is they who are the least wise, for they are the least happy. They should envy, not despise, the sort of talent which can alone give solid restful satisfaction.

Adela was created to be a really happy woman: fair to look upon; untroubled by passionate desire of heart or mind; placid of temper, unless her feet were wet, or she was unjustly made to feel silly, or else was disturbed in the usual round of her orderly habits. She took pleasure in small things, never seeing they were not great. She loved method for its own sake, just as she seemed to like the piano because she practised on it regularly for two hours a-day. She was the most conscientious of pianoforte players, and by dint of perseverance could read quite tolerably at sight. Miss Smith used to say it was never necessary to tell her to practise her exercises. And indeed it was not! It

irritated Nellie to hear her, just as it annoyed her to hear Nellie play. She had snubbed Eleanour into shyness about her music, for Adela could snub you as a white fog can chill. She herself had not talent enough either for music or art to know she had none. Twice a-week—on Wednesday and Saturday—she drew for exactly one hour and a half, and was pleasantly satisfied with her own copies of Miss Smith's water-colour landscapes. Miss Smith liked them too, though she did not consider them as good as the originals; but she highly commended her pupil as "most painstaking."

Adela had many excellent qualities. She was truthful and honourable, and had a much keener sense of right and wrong than poor Nellie—she could always see quite clearly what was wrong. It was really surprising what good principles she had. She must have inherited them by instinct from her father; but it could only have been by instinct, because Thomas was so hazy that even his virtues were absent-minded—though, I will allow, it was wonderful how the good in Thomas managed to come out as clearly as it did, for undoubtedly the clearest thing about Thomas was that he was really good and honourable and kind-hearted, so he must have had excellent principles somewhere.

Clara had never been much with Adela until now, for she had seen very little of her children. As yet she was only feeling her way into her daughter's character, and every now and then she would be nonplussed by one of Adela's clear ideas of right and wrong.

The mother, rightly understanding her daughter to be pre-eminently practical, did not pretend that, in relenting towards this love-match between Adela and George, she was promoting romance in a penniless cottage. As roundabout hints were of no earthly use with Adela, Clara told her plainly that George would be very well off. She was quite right in thinking Adela had no romantic notions of love and poverty, and would have disliked the idea of marrying George if she could not live in a nice house and place. Adela always intended to live in a place like Eastcourt—indeed, it had never struck her George could be poor when he was quite grown up. She knew boys at school were never rich.

"What is the name of George's place, mamma?" she asked. "I hope the grounds are large. And is there a nice house like this one?"

"Adela, you don't understand," said Clara quickly. "Do not talk of George's 'place' like that. People would think it so odd if they heard you. George will not get Crofton Place till his uncle Sir Cuthbert dies. When Sir Cuthbert dies, George will inherit it and the fortune."

Adela thought for a moment; then she said slowly, "If Sir Cuthbert did not die, would George be poor?"

"Sir Cuthbert certainly will die," said Clara shortly; "he is dying now."

"Dying now?" repeated the young girl, turning rather pale. "But, oh! may not he get better?"

"No, no!" cried Clara impatiently, rather misunderstanding Adela's feeling.

"Do you want him to die?" said Adela suddenly, with a look of horror. "That would be wicked."

"How dare you speak to me like this, Adela? How dare you?" exclaimed Clara, in that voice of hers which made her children tremble, and always seemed to put her in the right and them in the wrong. "You know perfectly well, Adela, I wish nothing of the sort."

The girl was frightened at herself. How could she ever have said what she had said? She was awestruck and silenced. And Clara quickly let the matter drop.

But with all its good qualities, Adela's nature was not made to bring others the happiness it calmly brought herself. What people, as they usually are in this world, ask of you is sympathy with their ambition—often their small ambition! sympathy with their dissatisfaction, their unrest; fire for their passion, not a chill; joy for their joy, grief for their grief. Like beggars, they are always asking and seldom give. Now it was in vain you craved sympathy from Adela, for there was no imagination in her mind or heart, although her heart was not unkind—it was that she could only feel what her two blue eyes saw quite clearly.

Nellie was longing for sympathy in the passion of unrest and yearning and great fear which had filled her heart since Charlie's last cold good-bye to her in the moonlight at Bluehaven. Yet, excepting her mother, Adela was the last person to whom she would have told her love.

If Nellie's love had been all hope and joy, her passionate young heart would still have craved sympathy with the strange emotion and surprise of its first gladness; but from the hour of that cold farewell, hope and joy had seemed dead to the young girl. Her thoughts were for ever dwelling on Charlie's sudden coldness. She could intensely feel the chill of his changed manner, just as if he still were standing coldly unmoved before her; and she could hear—she was always hearing—that hard tone in his voice. With much thinking, her imagination grew apace, as it ever does when fascinated by one thought, like the serpent's prey it sees but one terror on earth, and sees no other. The more she thought, the keener was the pang, for there was a feeling of guilty shame in it, vaguely understood but keenly felt, and Nellie was all feeling—she never tried to understand. She felt that Charlie had turned cold to her when she had gone to meet him. She remembered it was she had called him and had wooed him to that passionate kiss. Thinking of this, even in the dead of night, she blushed, as if the whole world were alight and looking at her. Then she would feel—and it was pain unspeakable—that Charlie had repented with cold repulsion of the warmth that she—yes! she had wooed from him; and she would again live through the pang of the last cold parting.

Tears, which soften so much sorrow in youth, could not soften that. They brought her no relief at first, because her heart was too much chilled, and hope

seemed dead. She felt that Charlie never could have loved her as she loved him, and now he would never care for her again; he would never come to claim her as his bride.

But hope cannot really die in youth; it is the vivid power of a young imagination which thinks it can. But it can not; and if for a moment it lies coldly still, break not your heart, for it will surely breathe again. Ah, youth! if you but knew it, you are blessed even in the sorrow you so passionately think you cannot bear. Your very grief is but too full of life; it is a storm, and like a storm has sunshine ever near. It is not the chill airless blight which falls upon the despair of later years—that calm, that dumb despair, broken of spirit, and so dead to hope, that it rebels no more, but wears cold disappointment like a winding-sheet, from which all heat and feel of ever having wrapped a living thing are gone. Dead despair! What is the living one to you? Its very life can tire it out. And thus it was with Nellie's; but not at first.

At first, though she did not know it, much of the very exaggerated despair which made hope seem dead, and all the yearning unrest of her soul, came really from this—that whereas she and Charlie had lived together all day long for one whole month, and alone together for one whole week, he now was gone away from her and she from him. She was sick from the desire to see his face and hear his voice again: it seemed so long since they had parted. "To be a long, long time away is just like death!" Charlie had said.

And it was like death to her—but to him? If only she could see him again and hear his voice, she would be quite, quite sure he had changed to her for ever. A few short moments would be enough, for if she saw him and heard his voice, she would know at once. She was quite sure he had changed to her, yet longed to be surer still. Oh! if only she could see him again and hear his voice. There had been a lifetime in the week they had passed alone together, and separation now seemed like the parting by death of two joined lives. "To be a long, long time away," she would repeat, "is just like death!" Yet if she counted the days of separation, they were not many. But there was silence, and it felt to her like the silence of the grave, between her and Charlie. She did not even dare to ask for him, nor dare to write to him; and she knew he would not write to her. So if only she could hear his voice and see his face just once, just once again!

This longing seemed unbearable to the young girl. She passionately rebelled against the pain of it; but her passion was powerless, for the possibility of seeing Charlie, or of hearing from him, was a hard reality, like a tightly knotted burden which must be borne. Never in her life had Nellie borne a galling load in silence, nor had she until now ever had a sorrow or a pain which did not quickly cease from aching. Suffering was hateful to her. She had no courage for it, and shrank from all pain like a coward. Poor Nellie was of a shrinking, timorous, and yet passionate

nature; and she had no moral courage at all: she was curiously without it. The fear she had of her mother was intense: from infancy she had felt frightened in her presence, and had instinctively avoided her, for she was sensitive to any hardness of nature, and requiring much sympathy, was strongly repelled by the want of it. Clara had always felt that Eleanour shrank from her, and, odd to say, resented it. Of her six daughters Eleanour was the one she liked least, although she intended, when the time came, to make a good match for her.

Miss Smith, who was a very kindly sort of creature when not awed out of her wits by Clara, never liked to make any complaint of Nellie, knowing Mrs Newsham would be hard to the girl. The governess had naturally noticed Nellie's often tear-stained eyes and low spirits, and sudden fevers of short excitement. If a carriage drove up the avenue, or there was any unwonted stir in the house, or if a door were opened suddenly, Nellie would betray emotion. She seemed to be always expecting some one who never came, or some event which never happened. And this was so, although the young girl had told herself she had no hope!

Nellie was in such an extraordinarily high-strung nervous state, that even her mother could not have failed to notice the curious change in her, had Clara not been fully occupied with Adela and deeply interested in the fine art of matchmaking. This fine art was comparatively new to her; and it was fast becoming a very pleasant pastime to her mind.

Then, also, it was quite a novelty for Clara to be much occupied with any of her children, and one at a time was certainly enough. Clara was in the habit of saying—"I can trust the dear children to Miss Smith —Miss Smith has excellent principles." And she really had not the leisure to look after them herself. When she had been visiting about for some time, or "consulting the doctors" up in town, she would come home with her large correspondence much in arrears, and Clara's correspondence is an important part of her social diplomacy.

Mrs Newsham kept Miss Smith in great order, as indeed she did everybody else. The governess was a nervous sort of person, not clever, and Clara's power of silent repression, and her constant near presence everywhere when at home, and the cold fear of her altogether, strongly affected Miss Smith's nervous system.

The governess quickly guessed what ailed poor Nellie, and without arousing any suspicion in Adela's preoccupied mind, easily found out from her who it was had been Nellie's hourly companion at Bluehaven.

Adela's two round blue eyes saw no change in Nellie, for the girl, never quick of perception, was now completely engrossed by the novel discomfort of being so constantly with "mamma," and having "mamma" watching her, and "mamma" saying curious things to her, which gave her such a very awkward sort of feeling. Adela would wish "mamma"

had never told her she was in love with George, and then would wonder if "mamma" really could be right in saying George was in love with her.

Adela would go and reflect upon this in front of her looking-glass. And she was so pretty, that if George had been any one but himself, she would have been quite sure he was in love with her. Gazing at herself in the glass was a pleasant habit she had soon fallen into. When not too sleepy, she would sit up at night and try what was the most becoming way of dressing her very fair hair; then she would take out her blue evening dress and her white one, to see which best suited her complexion. After much trying on for many nights, in divers charming attitudes, she did think she looked prettiest in the blue gown, and yet she was not quite, quite certain. So even by day, when she was doing her crewel-work, she would think over the blue dress and the white, and more than once she made wrong stitches.

Clara considered this a very hopeful sign. "At last," thought she,—"at last Adela is beginning to fall in love with George! She is getting absent-minded. I do wish she would forget to play her scales some morning; I should then feel sure of her."

Whilst Adela, arrayed in the blue gown, and with all the candles in her room lighted, would be smiling at her own reflection in the looking-glass, Nellie would be lying awake next door, weeping in darkness the tears she had not dared to shed by day. Youthful sorrow, unlike an older grief, can sob itself to sleep;

but Nellie slept little now at night, for, feeling very low and nervous and weak, she would take as many cups of her father's exceedingly strong coffee as she could unobserved. The coffee steadied her overstrung nerves, and did her good for the moment, but it kept her awake most of the night.

Thomas was a teetotaller, with a sluggish pulse and circulation, and a slow brain. He could stand any amount of the very blackest coffee, and considered it was not a stimulant. Dr Doseman declared it was; but Clara peremptorily forbade the doctor to argue on the subject with Mr Newsham. No one was allowed to remark how many cups of strong coffee Thomas took after dinner; and, doubtless feeling torpid all over, he would drink off half-a-dozen, though he would seem to think he had only taken one. "No, no, no!" he would say in his serious way, "one cup is enough. Not any more, thank you, my dear Nellie; one cup is enough—yes, yes, yes! quite enough"—and he would have drunk six!

Clara gave particular orders that the strongest coffee should be made for Mr Newsham. It enlivened him visibly. And really Thomas had one of those minds which you feel may any day go up altogether into the moon, and stay there and never come down again.

Clara would not have liked Thomas to be too lively and observant, and yet there were times when he provoked her.

"Thomas never understands anything," she would say to herself. "That ridiculous teetotal fad of his

will make it so difficult to have the right sort of young men at Eastcourt for the girls. That is another reason why I am forced to settle on George; he is accustomed to Thomas and his temperance fad, and is content to dine without a single glass of wine."

Nellie did not yet appear at late dinner, for she was not "out"; but when there was no company, she would come down to the drawing-room for an hour before going to bed. Absent as he was, it was her father who always asked for her. Clara resented this feat of memory. It is curious how often a mother who has no real love for her child will yet be provoked if there is love between that child and its father. Then Clara was accustomed to be the first person with everybody at Eastcourt, the one person to be considered in all things, and she had never had a rival.

Nellie felt her father loved her—not that he took much notice of her, but he would remark her absence, and liked her to give him his coffee. But the happiness of this feeling had its alloy in the increased severity of her mother.

"Hold up your head, Eleanour! I never saw any one stoop like you." "What a figure you are! Go up-stairs this moment and have your sash properly tied." "Eleanour! do you hear? Go to the piano instantly and play the new piece you learnt last week, and remember I shall be listening, and know how many mistakes you make."

The evening hour in the drawing-room had become a terror to poor Nellie. Miss Smith and the younger

children were not there to take off her mother's attention—even Sylvia had gone to bed. Fortunately Clara wrote many of her letters in the evening, when there was not company. Nellie always felt as if while she wrote she watched her; but this was nervous imagination on the young girl's part. Mrs Newsham invariably gave her undivided attention to her correspondence; she rarely wrote a letter without a motive, and her motives were numerous.

The dread of betraying her secret was an overpowering one to poor Nellie when in her mother's presence. All day long she would be trying to brace herself for the evening trial. The strong coffee would give her courage and nerve. Each night she seemed to want it more and more, though she knew it kept her awake, because once she had not taken it, and had slept. But the momentary fillip to her nerves was so pleasant that she never resisted taking it again. There seemed to be no power of resistance in Nellie's nature. She would feel so terribly unstrung next day after an almost sleepless night, that she would vow never again to touch the strong coffee; but when the evening came, she would break the vow and take it. And this went on for the whole month of September and part of October.

There were times when the morning wretchedness would be so great, and all hope so dead, that Nellie would feel she could no longer keep the secret of her unhappy love, but must have sympathy or die. She was only sixteen!

Twice she was on the verge of telling all to Miss Smith—she felt she could tell that kindly woman what she never could breathe to her mother or Adela. But Miss Smith nervously avoided the avowal. She dreaded to be told Nellie's secret, for it might be her duty to tell it to Mrs Newsham, and she feared Clara's cold hardness, and pitied Nellie's young love. Like most governesses, Miss Smith cherished in her heart the memory of a long-lost love, and her heart happened to be a soft one, though her face was now red, and her manner uninteresting, and you would never have suspected her of romance. Such a contrast as she was to Clara, who looked like a white angel of love, yet did not really know what love meant.

Miss Smith had never been able to think Adela was in love with George, although Mrs Newsham had told her so, and she was in the habit of believing implicitly what Clara said; still she could not believe this. But she did believe Nellie was in love, and with a young gentleman who had no fortune, and was never likely to have one. The governess was not clever enough to understand Clara, yet she had grasped the fact that Sir Cuthbert Crofton's illness gave Mr George the chance of a fine place and property.

And Sir Cuthbert seemed to be really and truly dying during the whole month of September—yes, really and truly dying! So was it any wonder if during that entire month, from beginning to end, Clara felt justified in amusing herself at Eastcourt by making Adela believe George was in love with her and

she with George, and that they had been both in love at Bluehaven?

On the whole Clara now found Adela very easy to manage—almost as easy as Thomas—for the only thing Clara could not manage about Thomas was his fads. But with these she did not meddle. "Thomas will have a fad, and if it is not one thing it will be another." It must be allowed that, in managing people and things, Clara knew what to let alone—she had the instinct of the art; then for many years she had been in the regular habit of managing everybody who came near her, and everything, even the most accidental circumstances! In fact, accident of the entirely unexpected sort was her strong point. As we all know, it was accident had taken her and Thomas and Nellie and Adela to Bluehaven—just the little accident of the Bishop being ordered there by Dr Fozzle! And it was quite by accident she had first got rid of the Admiral and then of herself, thus unexpectedly leaving Adela in a position where it seemed impossible for her not to be always with George.

But if accidents are your strong point, you naturally feel indignant when by some unlucky chance they threaten to take their own particular turn and not yours. If you run smoothly on your own lines, you do not like to be stopped just when you are coming out of the tunnel.

Sir Cuthbert had been steadily dying the whole month of September; yet what should he do in October but actually get better! Now here was an accident over which Clara had had no control.

A great specialist had been down to Crofton Place from London, and had almost declared himself puzzled by the case, though it was known this distinguished personage never quite avowed he was puzzled by anything, not even if a patient died just as he had pronounced him out of danger. The Shropwich doctor, really a very clever physician, in regular attendance at Crofton Place, was also reported to be unable to state certainly whether Sir Cuthbert intended to live or die. Kate had written to Clara saying Dr Stumps seemed puzzled. Perhaps it was the specialist had puzzled the Shropwich doctor and not the patient, for that specialist was such a very great man that he never entirely agreed with anybody but himself. How Clara wished she could only know what the Shropwich doctor really thought! Then she could arrange her accidents accordingly.

Clara had often been hospitably entertained at Crofton Place, and yet she now felt she had a right to be annoyed with Sir Cuthbert. It never struck her there was anything horrid in this. And yet she could so easily have realised through the imagination of her mind that it might be terrible to Sir Cuthbert to die, for though Clara has no imagination in her heart, she has a great deal in her powerful mind. It is true she did not say to herself I am hoping Sir Cuthbert will die. On the contrary, this is what she said: "I am wishing Sir Cuthbert may get clearly and hopelessly well, then I should be quite sure he would marry, and I should give up George altogether, and make Thomas take that house in town."

I must say if a man of fortune has no child and cannot take his good estates and name away with him into the next world, he should clearly make up his mind to live or else quickly die: it is his bounden duty to be undoubtedly in good health, or to have a well-known mortal disease. I think many near relations—excellent people as they invariably are!—yes! I think many near relations, and I know all matchmaking mothers, will agree that Sir Cuthbert Crofton's conduct in setting up an internal mystery of his own was simply intolerable.

And no internal mystery was ever more provokingly uncertain. Sir Cuthbert having once taken the turn which no one expected him to take, perversely went on getting better.

"I really must be careful," thought Clara, "or I may go too far, and make Adela fall so seriously in love with George that she will never marry anybody else, and Sir Cuthbert may get better and better, and finally get well."

So Clara had actually to stop matchmaking quite suddenly towards the middle of October. She missed the exciting pastime, and was dull without it. Her fine art was becoming a second nature to her. She soon got dreadfully bored at Eastcourt for want of her little amusement, indeed so bored that she went away to stay with her father the Bishop. Mrs Newsham liked presiding at the Palace and doing my Lady Bishop to the diocese, when she had nothing better to do. She was popular with the Archdeacon and the

Canons, and above all with the Dean. It was the simplicity of Clara's character, and her perfect unworldliness, which so much attracted the devout Dean. And then he found that charming Mrs Newsham held exactly the same views as himself! The Dean was decidedly High Church, and Clara was "high," though not too "high." She was just "high" enough to be really fashionable.

Mrs Newsham took Thomas and the three younger girls to Petersclose with her. Thomas went willingly, because he still had very much at heart that grand project of making the Bishop take the temperance pledge in his own cathedral, before his whole diocese.

"Decidedly," said Clara to herself; "as I must go to my father some time, it will be more convenient to go now than later on, when things are a little more settled, for if Sir Cuthbert continues to get better, I will drop George and take Adela about everywhere. At present, while the uncertainty remains, it is wisest to let her quietly alone, and I should not like to have company at Eastcourt for fear of complications. There is really no very great hurry about Adela, as she is not yet eighteen. That is the best of beginning very young with a girl. You have plenty of time before you. Besides," she added, "very young men are so much the easiest to manage."

When Clara left home, the household breathed more freely, Sylvia alone excepted, for she always said she "did not mind mamma," and she wanted to go away with her and pay "grandpapa" a visit; but

Sylvia was fourteen, and such a real beauty that Clara had already determined to make a great match for her. The Palace swarmed with poor clergymen and presumptuous curates. A very dangerous place indeed for the elder girls! Only fit for young children.

Miss Smith was always much happier when Mrs Newsham went off visiting; but she was far too discreet to allow it.

Adela was ashamed to feel glad as her mother drove away, yet felt very glad indeed. There had been a perpetual strain in her constant companionship with "mamma," and it was very pleasant to think she would now be left quietly alone and not constantly reminded of George, for there was really no necessity to be always thinking of him, and being in love was altogether such a very uncomfortable feeling. While "mamma" was away, Adela intended not to think about George, or about being in love at all.

Nellie stood on the doorstep and watched the carriage drive away. At any other time she would have been sorry to say good-bye to her father and the children; but the relief was too great for any thought but just this one, "She is gone! and I need not be in fear and trembling all day long." With a deep-drawn sigh of joy, like a prisoner suddenly breathing the free air, and overcome by it, she turned and threw herself on Miss Smith's neck, then burst into a flood of tears.

"I did not think you would be so sorry to see them go!" exclaimed the astonished Adela.

"Oh, Nellie always cries at everything," said Miss Sylvia, contemptuously: she was a precocious young lady, with a great opinion of her own wisdom. "But come on, Adela, we will play lawn-tennis. The grass is quite dry, and this may be our last game."

"Don't cry, dear Nellie," said Miss Smith soothingly, when the two girls had left them, and she led Nellie from the hall door into one of the sitting-rooms, where there were no staring servants. "Don't cry, dear child; I know you are sorry your father has gone away. You are always sorry when he goes, dear. He is very kind to you. He is kind to everybody."

"Sorry?" said Nellie, raising her head and brushing away her tears. She ceased sobbing, and for a moment was quite still; then with sudden passion, and returning tears, "I am glad!" she cried—"glad! glad they are all gone! Mamma would not have gone alone, and I should have died if she had not gone away!"

Miss Smith was horror-struck: she was a most proper-minded person, never said the wrong thing herself, and had never heard a pupil speak like this in all her life. She was too much confounded by the shock even to reprove.

"I could not tell mamma, but I must tell you, or my heart will break. I think it is breaking now," cried Nellie; and before Miss Smith's scattered senses came clearly back to her, Nellie had passionately poured forth, with much incoherent contradiction, her tale of

love and hope, and fear and hope, and no more hope, only certainty of disappointment and of sorrow. Miss Smith could not understand the story at all. She only understood that Nellie was desperately in love with Charlie Crofton, and this was just what the kindly creature did not want officially to know, for fear of bringing ill-luck on the young girl's love—ill-luck had come to her own love in the bygone years for ever past. Nellie's vehement passion frightened the quiet timorous woman, and all the ordinary commonplaces of reproof and propriety, which were returning to her memory, forsook her troubled mind again, for Nellie threw her arms a second time around her, crying, "I have told you what I could not tell mamma, though concealing it was killing me by night and day. It was killing me, because I could not ask for Charlie or know about him or even hear of him; but I can ask you for him now, and sometimes hear of him, and you won't be cruel to me!—never, never be cruel to me, or I shall die! I shall die!"

Miss Smith was so carried away by alarm and sympathy and feeling, that exactly the contrary of what she meant to say slipped from her heart.

"Dear child, dear child, compose yourself, and all will yet be well. Mr Charles will never change to you. He is a very good and nice young gentleman, and will keep his promise, and come to claim you the very day he gets into the army. To be sure he will, dear child! only compose yourself! compose yourself!"

Nellie abruptly disengaged herself from Miss Smith's encircling arms, though the kind woman was soothing and kissing her, and not scolding her at all, but only repeating with a sort of tender fear, "Compose yourself, dear child, dear child!"

Nellie stepped away from her, then stopped and stood still. She was no longer flushed but pale. The torrent of her rushing words was stayed. Her passion seemed to have spent itself, and she now spoke slowly, as if the overmastering impulse to tell all were past, and she were fearful of hastily saying too much.

"That evening on the water was not the last time Charlie and I met at Bluehaven. I . . . " She hesitated. "We . . . we met again." No! she could not tell this part of her story as it had really happened. "I . . . he . . . when he said the last good-bye to me, he was cold! he was cold! He had changed to me, and never will care for me again! All hope is gone, quite gone!"

She clasped her hands and bent her head. Her pale calmness reassured Miss Smith, who, like many timorous people, only feared and understood the boisterous passion which can speak—she thought Nellie had taken her advice like a good girl, and had "composed herself," and was now quite sensible again; so the governess was able to reflect comfortably and say what she felt she ought to have said at first, and which certainly was the right thing, and what Mrs Newsham would undoubtedly wish her to say, and be

pleased with her for having said if ever she had to tell the tale of Eleanour's love.

"Well, my dear," she said, "I am so glad you are composed and sensible, and like yourself again, because everything is for the best." Miss Smith had been telling her own heart this for so many years, that she almost believed it. "Yes, everything that happens is always for the best, and I am sure you will soon see this quite clearly,—and indeed, my dear, you seem to see it now, and considering Mr Charles's circumstances, and . . . and Mrs Newsham's ideas . . . very proper ideas—about the suitable establishment of her daughters, it is really fortunate Mr Charles should have changed his mind at the last, and not have allowed you to leave Bluehaven thinking he would come and ask you to be his wife as he had at first promised. It was honourable and right of Mr Charles to let you see he had changed his mind. Young men do change their mind, my dear, and often two or three times before they are quite grown-up, and Mr Charles is young, very young."

Nellie's hands were still clasped, and she was standing palely calm and seemingly unmoved; but while Miss Smith was speaking, she had raised her head and was gazing at her with a look of cold pain, like the look the good Bishop had seen at Bluehaven, and thought was the pallor of the moonlight upon her young face.

She spoke at last, but very, very slowly. "You said he would never change, and now you say he has

changed to me. I told myself all hope was dead, but . . . but I never thought you would think so too. Hope must be dead . . . you think it dead . . . dead . . . quite dead!" And she fainted at poor Miss Smith's feet. The sleepless nights, the mental strain had exhausted the young girl's strength.

CHAPTER II.

Sir Cuthbert Crofton over-exerted himself on Christmas-day, and became dangerously ill again.

Clara had left the Palace, and had come back to Eastcourt, so she immediately felt justified in returning to the pleasantest of pleasant occupations.

That was altogether a memorable Christmas-day, for Adela had slipped in the snow on her way to church, and had sat in her wet things all through the long service, sooner than tell "mamma." The girl had caught a very bad chill, but did not tell any one she had a cold upon her until some four or five days afterwards; then her sickness could no longer be concealed, and old Dr Doseman had to be called in.

Old Doseman was the fatherly tom-cat who had purred so pleasantly for years to Clara's voice. Clara, too, was in the habit of purring very sweetly to the old doctor. So they purred together over Adela, and then went on purring for quite a long time.

Dr Robert Doseman dearly loved being in regular attendance at Eastcourt; and a brilliant idea had struck Clara. Brilliant ideas, like unexpected acci-

dents, were the powerful side of Clara's genius. When first called in, old Doseman had said one of Adela's lungs was slightly affected—not that he would go so far as to declare it was actually touched! He would only say it was slightly affected. The affection might pass away very quickly and leave no seed of future disease; it also might remain. The doctor did not say it would remain; but if it did remain it might be serious. He did not apprehend serious consequences; yet serious consequences might possibly ensue.

Sir Cuthbert's internal mystery being in a very bad way, and seeming clearly to show fatal symptoms just then, it happened to strike Clara that a touched lung and yearning love went very well together. Lungs and love have for years, and will for ever, produce a very pretty sort of consumption, invaluable to the matchmaker; and no one should blame Clara for making use of one of the approved expedients of her difficult art. Clara was quite within her prerogative when, instead of a tubercle, she calmly determined to fix George on Adela's lung.

And, ah! what a sweet little scene there was between her and old Doseman when first, with smiling softness, she purred this little idea of a love-affair upon the lung into the very heart—the really kindly, tender heart—of the old family doctor!

"Ahem! ahem! my dear Miss Adela!" said Dr Doseman to his patient, and he opened his chest as he always did when giving advice. He had a way of vigorously throwing back his coat, sticking his two

thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat, and clearing his breathing with a cough, just to show how sound his lungs were, and how necessary to health it is to open well the chest. He did all this with much effect, for he had a very portly figure. Though rather short, he was altogether imposing in appearance. The natural benevolence of his countenance was solemnised by an air of quite mysterious pomposity. Pompous mystery weighted his long upper lip, and tightened his mouth, and seemed to double his chin right down into his waistcoat. He had a large and serious nose, which he blew sonorously, as if it were his duty to set an example of how to clear the head as well as of how to clear the chest. He brushed his iron-grey hair into a horn at each side of his head, and the two horns met in one over the baldness at the top. This pointed top-knot added height to his forehead, and made his brain-power almost imposing. "Ahem! ahem! my dear Miss Adela! Come, come, now, my dear young lady!" he said; "every cloud has a silver lining, and it is an ill wind blows no one good, and a long lane that has no turning; so let us keep up our spirits, my dear young lady, let us keep up our spirits, and all will soon be well. The course of true love never did run smooth; but just let us keep up our little spirits, my dear Miss Adela, and take our glass of port wine at eleven, and our tonic after luncheon, and our port wine again at four."

Old Doseman was indeed fond of ordering port

wine in Mr Newsham's house. It was a protest against Mr Newsham's—impudence ?—arrogance ?—insubordination ?—what shall I call it ?—in becoming a total abstainer without consulting his old family friend and medical adviser. Old Doseman liked to be called a "medical adviser" far better than a doctor, and always spoke of himself as such.

While in attendance upon Adela, the medical adviser met Nellie one day on the stairs, and thought her looking pale and out of sorts, so he then and there ordered her port wine too, just as he had done Adela.

The worst of going too violently into any one extreme is that you are apt to send everybody about you headlong into the other. When a man is in the habit of declaring with fanatical sincerity that every one who takes a glass of wine is virtually a drunkard on the highroad to crime, the fallacy is so apparent that those who would entirely agree with his temperance views, if moderately held and moderately expressed, are irritated into impatient enmity.

Now Clara did not in the least care for wine, and hardly touched it; but Thomas's "teetotal fad" irritated her, and so she ignored it whenever she could. She would be quite pleased when Dr Doseman ordered port wine in her house; but as Thomas would make a preposterous fuss if he knew of it, the port wine was, by Clara's orders, always taken secretly. Secrecy was not in itself naturally distasteful to Clara.

To do Dr Doseman justice, he wished the wine to

be drunk openly and at table, just as Thomas desired to see the Bishop take the pledge openly in his own cathedral.

Adela had not in the least understood the old doctor's speech about keeping up our spirits my dear young lady, and the cloud with the silver lining, and the ill wind that blew no one good, and the long lane that had no turning, and the course of true love which never did run smooth. But her mother carefully explained its meaning to her; and then poor Adela really did get ill.

She intensely dreaded old Doseman's visits. They threw her into a fever, for she had such a horror of what he might say next! And mamma was always present to hear—mamma, who thought she was in love with George! And Dr Doseman must certainly think so too!

No wonder poor Adela's pulse was all in a flutter; and a young girl's fluttering pulse tells a soft tale very plainly to a fatherly old tom-cat.

"Yes, Mrs Newsham," said the doctor, after paying I should be afraid to say how many visits,—"yes, Mrs Newsham, most decidedly you are right—you are right. You are always right, Mrs Newsham. I have never known you mistaken in a case. Never, my dear madam; never! Yes! you have perfectly diagnosed the young lady's symptoms; you have thoroughly understood them, my dear madam. But this little affair," continued the doctor, repeating without knowing it what Clara had said more than

once to him,—"this little affair must be settled, Mrs Newsham. It must not be permitted to drag on. No, no! Mrs Newsham, we must not permit it to drag on; for the consequences may be serious to Miss Adela's health. I will not positively affirm they will be serious; but I say openly, quite openly, they may be serious, my dear madam—very serious indeed!"

This was exactly what Clara had all along intended Dr Doseman should finally say. And when he did say it, she felt that George was firmly fixed on Adela's lung.

I think most people prefer to tell the truth if they conveniently can. The right-minded Clara was certainly pleased to have a doctor's certificate for rapidly sending Adela into just the sort of consumption which best suited her little plans. She instantly made practical use of the privilege, and quickly decided that her eldest son Rockhurst must consult a London dentist before he went back to school, and that in order to do so he must spend at least one night at Kate Crofton's house in town.

Rockhurst did not want to go to the dentist, and vowed, but vowed in vain, he had never had the toothache.

Clara knew better. And, like all her children except Tom, Rockhurst was accustomed to yield her implicit obedience. Clara often said to herself—for since her mother's death she did not say those sort of things aloud—but to herself she said, "Rockhurst

is, and always will be, as easy to manage as dear Thomas."

The handsome, tractable Rockhurst was a great favourite, so, although he invariably ended by obeying his mother, he was allowed to make a few remarks first.

"But I hate the dentist," he repeated; "and I have not got the toothache."

"You will get it in some important examination if your teeth are not properly attended to now. Besides, my dear Rockhurst, you need only go to the dentist once, and for quite a short time, the morning after you arrive. I am sure George can take a day's holiday, and it will be very pleasant for you to go about town a little with him. Now, you know, Rockhurst, you will be very glad to see George again, and you would not otherwise see him this vacation."

"But why not ask him here for a day or two instead, and then I could see him without going to that beast of a dentist? I know George could get a few days' leave from old Butt, for except six days at Christmas, he has had no vac.; and he is quite in the dumps at being left all alone in Chapel Street, for you see Aunt Kate can't leave Sir Cuthbert. Ask George to come here. I say, mother, just ask him."

In a moment Clara was all severe repression. Her tightly drawn mouth, and her tone of voice, alarmed her son. There is a severe tone in Clara's usually soft voice which her children have feared from infancy, and will fear for life.

"No, Rockhurst! I will not ask George to East-

court! George is not an honourable young man. I am sorry to say he has behaved badly."

Neither respect nor fear could prevent Rockhurst from exclaiming loudly, "I say, that's hard on George! and, by Jove! awfully untrue!"

"Rockhurst!" said Mrs Newsham, in a voice which silenced her son: she then paused. When she spoke again, it was even more severely than before. "George," she repeated, with cutting emphasis,— "George is not an honourable young man. He has behaved badly, very badly. He has almost killed Adela."

"Adela! killed Adela!" gasped the astounded Rockhurst. "George killed Adela! good Lord, mother! Adela is all right, only rather queer, because she is silly and makes a fuss about being grown-up. Ha, ha! George has killed Adela! Ha, ha! but, I say, what an awful joke!" And Rockhurst actually had the reckless temerity to laugh. He could not help it. Clara was amazed. But he did not laugh long.

"Rockhurst!" Her voice was enough to steady him at once. "How dare you?" she continued: Clara often said, How dare you? "How dare you treat a very serious matter as a joke? It is a very serious matter when a young man has trifled with a young girl's happiness, and without asking her parents' consent; and George has dishonourably trifled with Adela's affections. He has made Adela fall in love with him."

"Adela fall in love!"

"Rockhurst!!"

There was a repressing pause. Then Clara went on—"Adela is so much in love that she is threatened with rapid decline. Dr Doseman is alarmed—greatly alarmed. He thinks the consequences may be very serious indeed. Dr Doseman ascribes Adela's extremely critical state entirely to George. He is very angry with George, and says this sort of trifling must not be allowed to go on."

"Doseman is a confounded old fool!" The fatal words escaped Rockhurst's lips before he had time to realise their audacity.

"Rockhurst, you have insulted me, and insulted one of our oldest family friends," said Clara, leaving the room with majestic severity, and though small, she can be majestic on great occasions. "Rockhurst, you have insulted me!"

And the young fellow was left to his own reflections, and puzzling ones they were. Adela was in love with George! And he had imagined she hated him! And she was going into a rapid decline, and he had thought she only had a cold; just the sort of cold Thompson had caught last half, from sitting in wet things. Rockhurst was not sorry he had called Doseman a confounded old fool—because old Doseman was a confounded fool—and he rather suspected him of having advised that visit to the dentist. He did not care a rap if he had insulted old Doseman or not; but he did mind very much if he had insulted his mother, and for the life of him

he could not make out how he had done it. He had certainly had no intention of insulting her.

It was awfully unpleasant to be in the same house with mother when you had insulted her, even by accident. He soon found it was a hanged uncomfortable position for a fellow to be in! You could not keep out of her pervading presence; you were always meeting her everywhere, and from morning till night she was making you feel you had insulted her; but she did not blow you up and have done with the whole bother, which would have been a relief,—"like being swished once for all," thought Rockhurst. But no, her cold resentment was like a long imposition always "on your bones," and every one seemed to see you were in disgrace, even the servants attending at table; yet mother was wellnigh speechless.

Clara understood the power of silent wrath to perfection, and well knew how especially powerful it is with the young. She could act the coldly insulted one quite admirably, and had not unfrequently practised the art upon Thomas, though Thomas was really too absent a man to be a satisfactory subject; so much was lost on Thomas! He was apt to forget you had not spoken to him.

Clara much preferred practising on Rockhurst. His ill-concealed discomfort was very pleasant to her, for she liked to feel the power she had over her son. He was a piece of soft silk in her clever hand. She could put any idea into his head, and even persuade him into repentance when he had not sinned.

Clara soon had Rockhurst at her feet, and he actually apologised for having insulted her when he had not insulted her at all. No wonder Clara was fond of this son. But she did not show her affection weakly: she maintained the severity of her manner, with all the proper dignity of an injured woman.

She received her son's apology coldly. Still keeping him at arm's-length, she spoke to him very seriously; and then, for the second time, proceeded to inform him, with a calm solemnity severely impressive, that Adela was in love with George, because George had paid her marked attention. This time her son entirely believed her, and felt no desire to laugh; indeed he wondered he had laughed before.

Clara carefully explained to Rockhurst that it was not so much the open attention George had paid Adela which was so very reprehensible, as the marked manner in which he had avoided her, as if he had liked her so much that he did not dare to speak to her for fear of betraying his feelings to her parents.

"And now, Rockhurst," said Clara finally, and she was so severe that the overgrown boy felt as if he were somehow the culprit as well as George—"now, Rockhurst, when you go up to Chapel Street next Wednesday, you shall ask George his intentions——"

"Intentions?" faintly murmured poor Rockhurst.

Clara cut him short by repeating—"Yes, Rockhurst, you shall ask George his intentions. I simply insist upon it!"

CHAPTER III.

Rockhurst Newsham did go up to town on the following Wednesday, to "consult the dentist."

Before he left home, Clara had told him he was now a man. It is true he was past eighteen, yet in reality he was a mere boy. All Clara's children, except Nellie and Sylvia, were young for their age. Rockhurst was as young as young could be: he did not look seventeen, and he could not be lower down at school than he was; he had very nearly been superannuated. In fact, so much of a boy was he, that it seemed quite delightful to him to be called a man; and, above all, to be treated as such by his mother! for Clara had explained to him that although it was a brother's duty to protect his sister's happiness, she would never have allowed him to ask what George's intentions were, unless she considered Adela's brother quite a grown-up man. "Much as you might wish it, being Adela's brother, I should not permit you to do this thing, Rockhurst, unless I considered you to have the sense and discretion of a man. I entirely rely upon your discretion, Rockhurst."

As Clara had foreseen, the visit to the dentist was a short one. The dentist did not say there was absolutely nothing the matter with Rockhurst's teeth, because no dentist could or would commit himself to such a statement, but he did say—"There is not much amiss with your teeth, Mr Newsham. No, not much. Although I do see one or two little matters it would be as well to settle quite satisfactorily while we are about it. I shall not keep you long, Mr Newsham. But you have done right, very right, to have your teeth examined. It is well to have the teeth examined at least once a-year. To most of my patients, I recommend an examination every six months; for as I tell them, it is always wise to be on the safe side—undoubtedly the safe side is the wise one."

As Clara had also foreseen, George got a holiday. He did not ask "old Butt" for it, but took it of his own free will, saying quite grandly, "Confound that old fool of a crammer!"

Rockhurst was impressed by George's manner, and could not help feeling there was a change in his old friend. George had been nearly four months at Butt's, and a crammer's establishment makes a very independent man of you in no time.

When the short visit to the dentist was over, George and Rockhurst and a great "chum" of George's, that lively young swell Rattles, who had also given himself a holiday, "knocked about town" for the rest of the day. Rattles talked, joked, and smoked inces-

santly. He was dressed in the height of the fashion, everything on him was new, and he "shot his linen" in style, though, like George, he had only been four months at Butt's. Rattles was far more advanced in dazzling conversation, ideas, and cigars than George, yet George talked more than Rockhurst had ever thought he could have talked; and though he had not yet mastered the art of walking down St James's Street solely by the aid of his shirt-cuffs, he smoked in a way astonishing to Rockhurst, who could hardly smoke at all.

At first Rockhurst felt rather shy with Rattles, and was overpowered and silenced by him. But Rattles was kindly condescending in manner: amiable condescension was natural to Rattles. In passing the War Office, still by the aid of his shirt-cuffs, he said quite affably, "The Duke isn't such a bad fellow, I can tell you, and the army would be very different if he had his own way. Wouldn't go in for all this competitive humbug. Knows right well what humbug it is! The Duke would like to get the best men, and we get a confounded lot of undersized bookworms now. Why, there was that wretched specimen Sapper came out head of the list last time, and old Butt nearly died of joy. But if the Duke sees Sapper, I'll bet you a fiver he'll get a fit. Come, I'll even lay you twenty to one, Newsham, that the mere sight of Sapper will be apoplexy to the Duke. But hang it! what's the good of having a sensible fellow at the head of affairs when you don't take his advice?

The Government just kick H.R.H. over and take the advice of some palavering fool of their own, who doesn't know a private from a general. Awful shame! Wonder the Duke stands it. Hang me if I would! I'm all against these Cabinet duffers, except on the short-service question; on that I go the whole hog with them—by George, I do! for if they've got a lot of undersized, weakly rabble in the ranks, the sooner they get rid of them the better. By George! ought to have short service for the damned crammed competitive blokes too!"

Rockhurst was soon at home with Rattles. That young gentleman's good-humour and unceasing flow of lively spirits attracted him, just as they had fascinated George. As to George, he was the bidden slave of Rattles. It was quite curious to see him. Rattles was the sort of young fellow who is the terror of the anxious mother and the delight of the well-brought-up son.

But how could Rockhurst mention Adela's decline, and ask George what his intentions were, while Rattles was present? The thing was impossible.

The young men dined together at a fashionable restaurant, where they paid a fabulous price for what Rattles called a "confounded bad dinner and hanged bad wine." Then Rattles proposed—it was he who proposed everything—that they should go not to one theatre, but to two: "I say now, I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll just look in at the Frantic and see little Polly Prancer in the first act of the new bur-

lesque; capital in the first act! not worth seeing in the second. Then we'll go on to the Royal Lacrimose, and come in for the touching Laura's great scene, when she finds the fellow doesn't want to marry her whom she wants so awfully to marry, though she hated him once. Laura looks wonderfully cut up, they say. So awfully clever about her rouge. Puts on lots of it in the first act, and then rubs it all off for the great scene, but paints her eyes all through and darkens them with increasing affliction. Laura Lovelock is a first-rate hand at getting herself up, I can tell you; awfully well-dressed too! No end of diamonds, and dies in them all. Dies beautifully, they say. Awfully interesting piece!"

The notion of going to two theatres regardless of expense, to hear the best parts of two pieces, was an original idea of Rattles's. Rattles often had original ideas, and they were generally regardless of expense.

Rockhurst had actually never been to the theatre, except four times with Aunt Kate, and Aunt Kate did not go to burlesques.

I am shocked to say the quiet Rockhurst was quite carried away by the dancing and singing of pretty Polly Prancer. Perhaps it was the novelty of the thing, because Polly Prancer was certainly a vulgar little person. George was also decidedly taken with Miss Polly; but Rattles said, "Polly isn't quite up to the mark to-night — not in her usual form!" and dragged his two unwilling slaves on to the Royal Lacrimose. They just, but only just, arrived in time

for Laura Lovelock's great scene. As George and Rockhurst had not seen the beginning of the play, they did not quite grasp the situation at first. But Rattles somehow knew all about the plot, and, rather to the disturbance of some of the audience, kindly explained—"All through the first Act she hated the fellow she is now going to be so awfully in love with. Finds out he is awfully generous, and all that sort of thing, and was awfully in love with her when the play began; but now he thinks she hates him, just when she is beginning to fall in love with him, knowing him to be so awfully generous. You'll soon see how tremendously in love she really is. But she is only beginning to know it now, and he won't find it out till she rubs off all her rouge and gets deadly pale. That's just when she is going to die; and it is an awful shame they make her die. Awfully touching, too, they say. They might have let her live on with one lung. Lots of women live on with one lung. None of the really pretty girls have two."

Rattles kindly continued to keep up a running commentary on the plot. "Now look! there she is coming on again! And this time she'll be awfully in love with him. Hanged awkward position for a man when a lady is in love with him and he is not in love with her. But he is a lucky fellow not to have two of them in love with him at once. By George, lucky fellow!" This was said as if Rattles had had some curious experience of his own.

"There! she is going off again, for she is quite heartbroken now. I say! does it awfully well, though! Next time she will come on in white satin and with all her diamonds; and then she'll begin to die."

The fact that the handsome actress died in all her diamonds seemed to enhance in the eyes of the audience the pathetic interest of the death-scene.

Rattles was more moved than he would have cared to own; and both George and Rockhurst would have found it a relief to use a handkerchief, but were too shy.

Rattles lodged in Ebury Street, but he smoked and talked and walked with his two friends all the way to South Audley Street. He insisted on Rockhurst having a cigar. "By George! I say you . . . you don't mean to tell me . . . impossible, by George! so just try this, and I'll be hanged, Newsham, if you ever smoked a better one."

Excellent as the cigar undoubtedly was, Rockhurst did not care to have it perpetually in his mouth; but Rattles kept an attentive eye upon him. Rockhurst was indeed glad when Rattles hailed the one hansom left in South Audley Street and drove off to Belgravia.

He was feeling rather nauseously uncomfortable in himself; and then he had to ask George's intentions, and tell him of Adela's rapid decline, and he might not have time to do so in the morning; besides, it would be much easier to say the . . . well! it was the un-

pleasant thing his mother had told him to say. There was just time—just the right time, for there was not enough to leave a long awkwardness dragging on at the other end of his confidential communication. It was characteristic of the unbounded influence Clara had over her son, that the idea of disobeying his mother's instructions never so much as entered Rockhurst's head. He looked down Chapel Street. Yes! it was reassuringly short; but it might prove too short, unless he came directly to the point; and curiously enough, Rockhurst could not do this.

He began—"Awfully good death-scene at the Lacrimose." He had stumbled on this more by accident than intention.

George gave a whiff of his cigar, and answered slowly, with much less emotion than he felt, "Not bad. Dies well."

Chapel Street was certainly very short. Rockhurst threw his cigar into the road, and said quickly, "Awful pity the fellow did not know she was so tremendously in love with him."

"How could he, when Rattles says she hated him all through the first Act?"

"But I say, George," exclaimed Rockhurst, getting desperate, "perhaps she only pretended to hate him, and really liked him awfully. Half the girls do that sort of thing, and then set to getting their lungs wrong and dying of consumption, because they are secretly so awfully in love."

"But if they are such hanged fools, how the deuce,"

said George—"how the deuce is a fellow to know they are in love with him?"

"By their being so awfully rude and queer, and . . . all that sort of thing," said Rockhurst, nervously.

"Hanged clever fellow then who guesses it!" said George, quite naturally; "wouldn't strike most fellows, by Jove! Would never strike me a girl was tremendously in love with me because she was awfully rude."

Now here was Rockhurst's opportunity. Yet he hesitated. A few steps more and it would be too late. He was walking on. Suddenly that curious influence which I call the near presence of Clara stopped him short. "I say, George . . ." Dark as it was, Rockhurst could not look towards George, but turned away his head as if he saw something interesting in the murky dimness across the road. "I say, George . . . Adela . . . Adela . . ." Then he blurted out, "She is awfully in love with you!"

George was too astounded for speech. His cigar fell from his lips. He stood perfectly still as if shot. His absolute silence confused poor Rockhurst, who tried hard to say all he had been told to say, but could only mumble, "Consumption . . . old Doseman . . . rude . . . queer . . . awfully in love . . . mother says may die . . . mother awfully alarmed . . . awfully angry too."

At the mention of Clara's name, George moved again like an automaton whose spring has been touched. He bent down; peered on the pavement; found his cigar; picked it up; blew it slowly into

life; gave two deliberate whiffs, and at length spoke. "By Jove!" was all he said.

He walked on. Rockhurst walked on also. George was actually at his own door. It was very dark there. The door lamp was out. Rockhurst took desperate courage, and stepped in front of George. "I say, old fellow! Adela so awfully ill . . . so awfully . . . in love, and . . . and all that sort of thing! that mother told me to . . . to ask your intentions, old fellow! Though she is awfully against this match; or rather," he added, remembering his lesson more correctly—"or rather, mother was awfully against it once, but she is not so much against it now."

George jumped back. Never was any one more amazed than he. "Intentions? By Jove! intentions? Good Lord, I've no intentions! Tell Mrs Newsham I have none. It is all bosh about Adela's liking me. She hates me! and she hated me at Bluehaven; and you may tell Mrs Newsham so, and tell her we were awfully careful to avoid each other from morning till night—and, by Jove, it was not always as easy as it looked! We hated being in the boat together, and I had always to ride in one direction because Adela always rode in the other. Got dreadfully bored perpetually riding on one road! Hang me if I ever paid Adela any attention! and Mrs Newsham knows that right well."

"But look here, George, that is just what mother says! and that is why she is so awfully angry with you. She says you made Adela so awfully remark-

able by avoiding her, as if you liked her so much you were afraid to talk to her. Mother would not have minded if you had paid Adela open attention, but she is awfully angry at the marked manner in which you avoided her. She says that is why Adela has fallen so tremendously in love with you." Rockhurst had had this part of his lesson well impressed upon him by Clara. He added, "Mother says most girls are like Adela."

"Then they are hanged fools!" exclaimed George, angrily,—"like that woman in the play to-night. And, by Jove, she was a fool! Served her right the fellow never guessed she was in love with him."

George walked forward, and managed, dark as it was, to put his latch-key in the door. Just as he was in the act of turning the key, he said hurriedly, "I say, Rockhurst, no chance of Adela really dying?"

"Don't think so myself," answered Rockhurst truthfully; "but mother and old Doseman do."

Then George exclaimed, as Rockhurst had done before him, "Old Doseman is a confounded fool!" and went in.

The young men lighted their candles in silence. But, on parting for the night, Rockhurst spoke,—"Awfully afraid must leave by the first train to-morrow," he said. "Don't you get up, George."

"No, old fellow; I won't."

They understood each other, and parted all the better friends for doing so.

CHAPTER IV.

When George had distinctly declared he had "no intentions," almost any one but Clara would have decided that Adela should instantly fall in love with some other eligible young man. But Clara is no more like ordinary people than Sir Cuthbert's internal mystery was like most satisfactory diseases.

Mrs Newsham was in a state of trying indecision. Would it be well to give up George, or would it not? Ah, if only, if only she could know what that Shropwich doctor thought of Sir Cuthbert! Kate had written over and over again: "The one person who seems to understand poor dear Cuthbert's singular case is Dr Stumps, for his medicines alleviate the very great suffering there is at times, while the medicines of that great man from London made Cuthbert feel much worse."

Indecision is very painful to those who are accustomed to make up their mind rapidly and to manage accidental circumstances with a high hand. Indecision was becoming intolerable to Clara.

She bore it six weeks, and then she could bear it

no longer. In another three weeks George would be going in for his examination, and if by any chance he happened to pass, Clara felt he would no longer be a bird in her hand—for, once in the army, he would be going out regularly into society; his eyes would open widely, and in no time he would be falling in love of his own accord—perhaps with a fortune.

So Clara took a great resolve: she determined to consult that Shropwich doctor about *her own health.* It was quite possible to go from Eastcourt to Shropwich and back in one day.

Dr Stumps's practice was entirely provincial; yet it struck the good doctor that, even in the remotest country parts, he had never met any one quite so simple, and tenderly soft, and perfectly unaffected, as this frail-looking fair lady, who had come such a long, long distance in order to get his valued opinion. It pleased Dr Stumps to find his reputation had reached all the way to Nossex.

The doctor had never been purred at before, and the sensation was agreeable. In an incredibly short time he was quite in the humour to let this interesting lady, whose complexion was so transparently white, have any nice little malady she wished. Being a ruddy man himself, he never quite believed in a very white, transparent complexion, and he took Mrs Newsham's hand, expecting to find the uneven throbs of a weakly, palpitating heart: for a moment he was disconcerted by her excellent pulse.

Clara saw this, felt her pulse herself, and exclaimed,

"How strange! Now that is strange, Dr Stumps! But it is the effect of change of air. Change of air always has a perfectly miraculous effect on my pulse. The fact is, Eastcourt is a damp place, and I never think it agrees with me for very long; it certainly disagrees with me in the spring and early summer. We have a very, very large lake there, quite near the house, and the miasmic exhalations from all that water are often extremely trying—especially after the spring rains."

It was one, and only one, particular sort of illness which Clara was determined to have when she consulted a doctor. It was that malady so common amongst ladies, for which there is but one known cure—a house in town during the London season.

Dr Stumps soon took Mrs Newsham's view of her own "case." It was a curious fact that, as yet, Clara had never come across a doctor who did not take exactly her own view of her case. So no wonder she liked doctors.

The very last moment of a lengthy interview had come, and Clara had already insisted on the doctor's taking the two-guinea London consultation fee, and she had all but left the room, when, turning back at the door as if through an afterthought, she softly said—

"Ah! by the by, Dr Stumps, if I had not almost forgotten to tell you it is the very high estimate my sister-in-law, Mrs Crofton, has justly formed of your abilities, which made me come all this long distance for the sole purpose of consulting you about myself.

I do assure you, Dr Stumps, my sister-in-law's confidence in you is unbounded—quite unbounded; for she says you are the one person, the only person, who has done poor dear Sir Cuthbert any real good. And what a pleasure—what a very, very great pleasure—it is, Dr Stumps, to think that at last, at last poor dear Sir Cuthbert is really taking the right turn." Clara's voice was low and sweet as she said this.

"The right turn!" exclaimed the doctor, quite thrown off his guard. "Would to God, Mrs Newsham, it could be the right turn and not the wrong one Sir Cuthbert will surely take!"

Clara turned pale. "The wrong turn, Dr Stumps? And my sister-in-law seems full of hope!"

"Poor Mrs Crofton! Is it possible she still deceives that kind heart of hers? Poor Mrs Crofton! and I thought that at last she had opened her eyes to the hopeless truth."

"The hopeless truth!" repeated Clara, with downcast eyes and a tightening mouth.

"Sad case, sad case," continued the doctor; "never knew of a much sadder one. For Sir Cuthbert should be in the very prime of life. Fine career before him. Devoted to his profession—devoted. And he was sure of an Embassy with his fortune and great talents. A clever, a very clever, clear-sighted man Sir Cuthbert. Sad case, sad case! The poor fellow may struggle on a little time longer, but can't recover. No hope—none!" Dr Stumps spoke with real feeling.

Clara turned still paler than before. Cold as is her nature, she was not unmoved. To hear certainly that Sir Cuthbert Crofton was a doomed man when she had wished him doomed, did for one instant—but no more—yet for one instant did make her feel as if it were her own strong desire that had killed him. This ugly dart of unreflecting conscience quickly glanced aside, and Clara could speak words of tender sympathy for poor dear Sir Cuthbert's sad, sad state. It is true her voice trembled a little at the first few spoken words, as a murderer's might when the murdered's name first rose upon his lips. The emotion of the pale, fair woman with the downcast eyes seemed very kindly sympathy to the worthy doctor, and he thought it would be well if all fine ladies had as kind a heart as this charmingly elegant and aristocratic-looking Mrs Newsham of Eastcourt. To him Clara seemed a very fine lady indeed, and he was pleased to have her as a patient; for he was not like Monsieur Diafoirus—*qui aimait mieux médicamenter le peuple.*

As Clara was passing through the hall, she heard the doctor's waiting-room door open, but she had not the curiosity to look round. Her mind was much engrossed with what she had just heard.

A flight of steps took you down from the doctor's hall door to a little paved path that led between four flower-beds to a wire archway, from which a big red lamp swung. The small gate under the archway opened before Clara by some contrivance connected with the hall door. She walked out, the gate

slammed behind her, and she heard the hall door slam too. She looked up somewhat absently, being full of thought; she looked up, and found herself face to face with—Sir Cuthbert Crofton!

Propped up amongst many cushions, he was lying rather than sitting in an open carriage exactly in front of her. His changed face looked drawn and wan, but the bright eyes were undimmed. Clara quailed beneath their keen, keen glance. Sir Cuthbert noticed that she did so. Twenty-two years in the diplomatic service had sharpened his natural power of instinctive observation. He raised himself a little; but it was not much the poor man could now move without help. Still leaning back, he gave his ungloved hand to Clara, and she had to take it. It was a very white and wasted hand—a sick man's hand, grown pale and thin and blue-veined, like a weak woman's—a touching hand to see. Even Clara felt it was a touching one, and would fain have dropped it quickly; but its grasp was firmer than she had thought it could have been.

Sir Cuthbert said, "Ah, Mrs Newsham, so you have been to inquire for me, and to know if I am to get well again? You are kind, very kind, Mrs Newsham." His voice had that pathetic sound in it which a sick man's voice, robbed of its full-toned vigour, ever has, even to a hardened ear.

Clara lost her presence of mind. "No, no," she stammered—"not . . . not about you." Then quickly recovering her self-possession, though with downcast eyes, because she hated to meet Sir Cuthbert's keen

glance, she added, very plausibly, "I have been consulting Dr Stumps about my own health, Sir Cuthbert, for I never am very strong." She said this quite prettily. "No, I am never very strong; and I did wish so very, very much to get the advice of a man whose abilities I have heard so highly spoken of by dear Kate; for now, really, dear Kate never does tire of praising Dr Stumps."

"Kate is in there consulting him now, Mrs Newsham," said Sir Cuthbert. "But, unlike you," he continued, speaking slowly—"unlike you, Mrs Newsham, Kate is consulting Dr Stumps about me."

Clara looked up; she could not help it. Her eyes met Sir Cuthbert's penetrating gaze. It was as if she saw the lie she had told standing there uncovered, looking back at her. The colour which so rarely tinges the marble of her fair cheek rose upon it now, and she felt herself blush, and saw Sir Cuthbert smile in a curious sort of way.

The whole scene was over in an instant; and Clara, having murmured something about trains not waiting for any one, was walking rather hurriedly down the High Street. Sir Cuthbert, with that smile still playing round his wan lips, watched her as she went.

"*Elle ment et ne trompe pas*," said the diplomatist, in the words of Talleyrand. And from that hour he called Clara "Metternich."

CHAPTER V.

I DO not think any one with the highest moral sense was ever more sincerely put out at having told what can only be called a downright lie than Clara; for she saw Sir Cuthbert had not in the least believed her. It is not at all Clara's habit to tell real lies. A lady engaged in the arrangement of accidents, and involved in the complications of matrimony, cannot always get on without a little verbal diplomacy of that intelligent sort which suits itself instinctively to the accident or the person it is necessary for the time being to manage. But what Clara really likes is to leave you under a false impression, and she greatly prefers to do this by silence than by deliberate speech; and indeed, when she has to speak, she is quite fond of telling you half the truth. Now half the truth can never be called a lie, and yet it may produce exactly the same effect.

Clara was dreadfully annoyed at having been surprised into an unmistakable lie — dreadfully! But she was not merely angry with herself; she was far more angry with Sir Cuthbert, and she never again

deceived herself into the idea that she wished him to get hopelessly well.

"I know exactly the sort of man Sir Cuthbert is," she reflected, irritably — "an underhand, designing, suspicious diplomatist. Diplomacy quite unfits you for private life, for you are always suspecting everybody of being as intriguing as yourself. I see clearly what will happen. Sir Cuthbert will say I went to ask Dr Stumps how soon he is going to die. That is just the sort of spiteful thing he would say. And he will talk me all over quite openly with Kate, and put notions into her dense head. And then there is that dreadful, dangerous Admiral staying on at Crofton Place! I am sure he has been joking about George and Adela, and talking in the most shocking, imprudent manner possible. Just like him! He is a dangerous man, and capable of doing endless mischief. I do wish Cutlass Cutter would send him out to the West Coast, and be quick about it. At any rate, I have no time to lose. If this match is to take place at all, it must be settled immediately, before those odiously suspicious Croftons think there can be time for me to act. Sir Cuthbert is a regular man of the world, and the instant George gets into the army he will begin putting heiresses into his head. It certainly is shocking to see a man carry his worldliness into the grave like Sir Cuthbert! I am sure I would give up George altogether if I knew any one who would suit Adela as well. But now, really, considering Adela's prospects, I do not see she ever could do better than

George. It is a very fine old property, a beautiful house, and just the sort of neighbourhood which would be an advantage to Sylvia and the younger girls; and we have no neighbours of the right sort here at Eastcourt except that worldly, intriguing Lady Harchester. I cannot help thinking, too, that George must be feeling very nervous at the notion of sending Adela into a rapid decline, especially as I have taken care the idea should be kept alive in his mind."

Clara was right. George had never been quite comfortable about Adela since Rockhurst's visit to Chapel Street and the dentist; and the uneasiness had been kept up by rumours of Adela's touched lung which had been reaching his ears, on and off, for the last six weeks, from the most unexpected and widely opposite quarters.

Then it must be understood George was no longer the same boy he had been at Bluehaven. He had got many new ideas from the men at "Butt's," and his mind had been a good deal upset on most subjects by Rattles: it was delightful to Rattles to upset young Crofton's mind. So what George would have considered actual "R.O.T." in the month of August seemed to him the right thing towards the end of the following February. He had not been long at a crammer's before he discovered it was quite the thing to be in love; or if not in love yourself, to have some one in love with you. Rattles had two young ladies in love with him. "Have to keep clear of them both," said he confidentially to George. Rattles was very confi-

dential, and yet very outspoken, on the subject of his love affairs. "Have to keep clear of them both, or I might be asked my intentions."

As ill-luck would have it, George instantly told Rattles he himself had already been asked his intentions.

"Your intentions! *You* asked your intentions! *You!* By George, but you are precocious! I say, you are such an awfully grown-up-looking sort of fellow for your age!" Rattles considered George a perfect baby.

"You see," said George, naively, "I naturally thought she hated me, because she was so awfully rude and queer; but it seems she was only awfully in love with me." And the story, as George gave it, did seem such an "awful joke" to Rattles—the very best joke he had heard for many a day. To do him justice, it never once struck him it was anything else.

"Whoever," thought Rattles, "could have guessed that meek-looking Newsham was up to such a joke! Hang me if I did not think he had nothing in him! But this is a lark!" So, instead of reassuring George on the subject of Adela's lung, Rattles amused himself by taking a very serious view of the lovelorn lung, and by persuading George he had made a terrible mistake in letting a girl fall so desperately in love with him. "Now," said Rattles, "there is a certain point at which I make my young ladies stop short."

Hardly a day went by without Rattles inquiring confidentially for Miss Adela's health. He would even

pass up a bit of paper the whole length of the room at Butt's with—"No bad news, I hope? You look rather down in the mouth," or words to that effect, written on it.

Rattles took George to the Royal Lacrimose time after time. "Just in your line, my good fellow," he would say; "she is so awfully in love with him without his knowing it. Odd that no one asks him his intentions! First-rate play! awfully moral too! teaches a fellow not to trifle even by accident with a girl's affections. Saw the moral of it awfully praised the other day in the 'Times.' The 'Times' always does stick up for the moral of everything!"

Whenever George had been to see Laura Lovelock's great death-scene, he certainly did feel for some little time afterwards that it was not impossible Adela might really have fallen in love with him without his knowing it.

Jack Rattles was not slow in noticing the effect the piece invariably produced on his friend, for the amused Jack kept his eyes wide open and noticed everything, and at times quite pestered poor George with questions. He was constantly asking, "I say, Crofton, awfully good-looking, isn't she?"

George never knew if Adela ought to be called pretty or not. This uncertainty did seem to Rattles such an "awful joke"! And that was why he kept so constantly asking, "Awfully good-looking, isn't she?"

At last the long-suffering George got out of temper.

"Hang it, Rattles! don't bother me any more. If you had seen Mrs Newsham, you would know exactly what Adela is like; awfully white and fair, and—all that sort of thing; only Adela does not look through a fellow like her mother."

"The mother looks through you, does she? I say, then, take my advice and keep clear of her."

"Awfully difficult though," said George; "she is my stepmother's sister-in-law."

"Good heavens!" cried Jack Rattles; "then you are in a fix! She'll be like one of those dear relations always on your bones, whom a fellow is so awfully anxious to avoid! She'll be cropping up everywhere; and look here, I say," he added, with infinite glee, "it is she herself will be coming to your house and asking your intentions next time. By George! you'll have her down upon you to a dead certainty. But I say, Crofton, if ever she does swoop down here, you just send for me. I'll be a match for her!" Rattles's self-confidence was sublime.

A match for Metternich Mr Rattles could never have been! But he might have proved a great inconvenience to her, and he would undoubtedly have been some little help to the ingenuous, defenceless George. But George was an unlucky fellow, and Clara was a very lucky woman, for it was only on rare occasions, and with some wily old serpent like Sir Cuthbert, that ill-luck befell her.

Her fortunate star was certainly shining in heaven —or somewhere else—when Rattles left town on a

ten days' visit to a friend—just to "keep himself going for the grind," by a few runs at the end of the season—exactly thirty-six hours before Clara appeared in Chapel Street. For Clara did appear there within a week of that memorable visit to Shropwich—and she was accompanied by Adela.

Clara made her unexpected and purely accidental visit seem quite natural by her usual expedient of going up to "consult the doctors." She knew the doctors would do well enough for George, and she could think of no better excuse; indeed, what better one could she ever have found?

Those London doctors! Ah, those London doctors! they are simply invaluable! Many and many a lady would never get up to town unless she came to "consult the doctors." A lady can always take her daughter up to London solely to "consult the doctors." She will even be able to drag the dullest husband out of the dullest country place and bring him up to town in the very height of the season, merely to "get an opinion," as she will call it, not being quite altogether perfectly satisfied with the state of "dear William's," or "dear Henry's," or "dear Thomas's" health.

Metternich, knowing Kate to be certainly at Crofton Place, had written her a little letter addressed to Chapel Street, saying:—

"My dearest Kate,—Can you? now can you give *me* a bed, just for one, *one* night? I am going up to town to consult Sir Jonathan Johnston, as I have not

been feeling *quite* the thing of late! and I am also taking up Adela, but merely for the day. I wish her to see Dr Williams-Smith, the great lung authority, as, I am sorry to say, and I am sure, my dear Kate, you will be grieved to hear, that her health has been a matter of *very, very* serious anxiety to me during the last few months."

Then Clara took good care to arrive in Chapel Street almost with her letter, before there really could be time to send it on to Crofton Place. She chanced the accident.

George was eating his solitary luncheon when a cab with luggage stopped at the door, and before he had time to think there must be some mistake, to his frightened amazement, to his disgust, out stepped Mrs Newsham, followed, to his greater horror, by Adela! And right upon him, straight into the dining-room, they walked.

Clara came in with a sort of beautiful Madonna-like composure; but poor George thought Adela looked as if she might faint or even die on the spot. George was painfully bewildered, and lost his presence of mind, and let himself be kissed by Mrs Newsham as if he were still a mere child; and then he nearly kissed Adela himself by mistake! though her manner was cold to him. Her mother had told her to be very cold.

But George's flustered surprise was nothing to the unbounded astonishment expressed by Clara on dis-

covering what she already knew, that Kate was at Crofton Place, and not in Chapel Street at all! "And, I declare, here is my own letter lying on the mantelpiece!" It was in the discovery of what she well knew beforehand that Metternich was truly admirable. The name suited her to perfection.

Clara read her own letter aloud before she burned it, because it had really been written, not for Kate, but for George. The unfortunate fellow winced painfully when she came to the part about Adela's health. He glanced at Adela. She gave him a frightened look in return, changed colour, and seemed very, very much agitated.

Clara read out slowly and quite pathetically the words, "I am sorry to say, and I am sure, my dear Kate, you will be grieved to hear, that her health has been a matter of very, very"—here she made a telling pause—"of very serious anxiety to me during the last few months."

George instinctively looked at Adela; and when she saw him looking again, she turned white, then red, then looked towards her mother. But Clara appeared to see nothing—she was quietly burning the letter.

"Oh, my dear George," she said, with much kindly consideration—"my dear George, I do so hope I am not putting you out in any way! and naturally you never, never could have expected me! and Sir Jonathan Johnston says he positively cannot see me until past four o'clock! So provoking! for unless I spend

the night here, I must leave by the four train. So now really, really, George, I must ask for a bed."

George was so taken aback he could not quickly answer, and Clara went on in her gentlest voice, "Poor dear Adela has an appointment with Dr Williams-Smith—the great chest opinion, you know. He is to call here at a quarter to three"—and she added, with tender softness, "I knew dearest Kate would not mind. Dearest Kate is always so very, very thoughtful and kind." Then continued, "I am sure, George, Dr Williams-Smith will be punctual, so Adela and her maid will be able to catch the four-o'clock train."

George was immensely relieved to find Adela was not going to stay in his house as well as her mother. He wondered if he could not get rid of Mrs Newsham too, but said, politely enough, he would ask Emma if it were possible to get his mother's room ready for the night.

He had great hopes, in fact he was almost certain, Emma would refuse to do so, for she had made an extraordinary fuss once about getting that room ready for Rattles, one night when he had asked that agreeable fellow to sleep in Chapel Street after a visit to the Lacrimose. Clara proposed to ring for Emma and speak to her herself; but George eagerly jumped at an excuse for leaving the room.

He was alarmed to see Mrs Newsham's luggage in the hall, and to find the cabman had driven away.

But he still had hope, and said to the tyrant of his household, "I say, Emma, Mrs Newsham wants

to stay here to-night." The old servant looked glum, and had George stopped then all might have been well; but he foolishly went on, "Emma, I don't think you could have mother's room ready in time, for you know you always say there is so much dusting or something to be done." Poor George! this was an ill-judged remark. Emma fired up.

"A body would think, Master George, I keep this 'ouse like a pigstye! So you just go and tell Mrs Newsham there's nothing to be done to that 'ere room, and that's more than she could say for any bedroom at Heastcourt; for it is I that knows the hins and houts of that grand place. Grand place indeed! A pack of tossed-off girls for 'ousemaids, and not one of 'em as knows her business! Master George, you just tell Mrs Newsham there is a room for her, and for Miss Adela too, and for her maid as well!"

"No, no, no!" cried George; "no, no! they are not going to stay, Emma. Miss Adela and the maid are going home by the four-o'clock train."

"They've no need to, and you just tell 'em so, Master George. I've a mind to tell 'em myself," said Emma, stoutly.

"Don't, don't!" implored poor George, for Emma had been tyrant of the household as long as he could remember anything; "I beg you won't, Emma. Having a lot of people in the house would interfere with my cramming."

"Cramming indeed!" exclaimed the indignant Emma; "and much good they'll ever cram into *your*

head, Master George. They'll just cram you into a 'sylum, or a 'ospital, or a hidiot, with their new-fangled nonsense! Young gentlemen are not young gentlemen nowadays. You don't see one of 'em holding up his 'ead straight and 'appy. They're a poor, broken-backed, spiritless lot. That they are! Unless it's one of them as will come to no good, like that young Rattles——" George had quite disappeared down-stairs by this time, so old Emma added, "There's that Miss Adela, as pretty and nice-spoken a young lady as you might see hanywhere, and Master George a-sayin she'd interfere with his cramming! It's just hunnatural! That it is! Like some sort of strange, 'eathen, young cannibal man!"

George merely put his head in at the dining-room door. "Emma says you can have a bed to-night, Mrs Newsham. I'm off to Butt's. Very busy to-day. Awful hurry!" And off he was, out in the street and across the road, before Clara could call him back.

He had not said good-bye to Adela; not that he had in the least forgotten to do so—he was merely in mortal terror of paying her attention unawares.

But when he had got as far as Park Lane, it struck him, to his dismay, that perhaps Mrs Newsham would say his running away so abruptly was a marked avoidance of her daughter more particular than any open attention. George was indeed glad he had told Rockhurst clearly he had "no intentions," and he now felt that had placed him in the right position. "As Mrs Newsham knows I have no intentions," he reflected,

"it really does not much matter how I behave;" and he wished he had remembered this before. He would then have said good-bye quite naturally to Adela. He hoped Adela had not thought his abrupt departure rude and snubbing, for he did not want to seem unkind to a girl who had nearly gone into a consumption for secret love of him. Yes! he did believe she was very ill, and he hoped the doctor would not think there was any chance of her dying. She did not cough much, and she could walk without help. He had noticed that she had got out of the cab quite easily; but she was certainly a little thinner.

George had seen a great deal in those two furtive glances, and, above all, he had seen that Adela was really pretty. He wondered he had never seen this before; perhaps being in a sort of consumption made Adela prettier than she used to be. He had often heard Rattles say no really pretty girl ever had two lungs. He felt he could now tell Rattles with perfect truth that Adela was pretty.

"Poor Adela!" he said to himself, "she is ill; and I think I may have been rather hard on her and down upon her long ago for being a duffer." He remembered how deadly pale she had turned on first coming into the dining-room after her mother. She must secretly have felt seeing him again very much, or she would not have got so white; and then, though her manner had seemed cold, her little hand had trembled when it touched his in a way that was moving to a very young man who had been living

entirely out of ladies' society and cramming hard for the last six months.

George had started for Butt's a quarter of an hour earlier than usual or than was necessary. Butt lived in Brompton. George dawdled leisurely on by the empty Row; and, strange to say, he began thinking of Adela again. He had never before in his whole life thought of her so much. The truth is, he had nothing to think of just then that he cared about, for he was not really interested in his work; it was only an "awful grind" to him. He missed Rattles dreadfully; he never wanted to think of anything interesting or not, when Rattles was with him. Rattles had become a part of his existence, and he was dreadfully bored without him. If this lively, agreeable fellow had been in town, I don't think George would have cast two thoughts upon Adela.

"Well, at any rate, Rattles can't chaff me any more, for I'll tell him Adela is a long sight prettier than either of his young ladies. He would admire Adela's white skin. Hang me if I ever thought it pretty before! but I see it is the right thing now; and Rattles does go on so about a woman's complexion. I'll bet a fiver he will fall in love with Adela. No end of a pretty girl if a fellow was a marrying man! But hang it, I'm not a marrying man! Awfully hard up! If I was flush of coin, I'd dine with Courtney and go to the Frantic. Courtney is not such a bad fellow when you can't get any one else. Anyhow, I'll cut Mrs Newsham and the whole concern. I'll

be blowed if I dine with her alone! Let's see——" He pulled out one shilling from his waistcoat-pocket and looked at it ruefully. "Awfully hard up!" he repeated,—Rattles had certainly proved an expensive friend,—"never was so hard up before!"

He looked at the shilling again, then dived into all his pockets, but only to find a solitary sixpence. After as much thought as he would have given an examination paper, he came across an idea. "Have it! I'll buy half-a-dozen buns, and stay on at Butt's till ten o'clock, as if I were going in for an exam.; and when it is near dinner-time I'll send Mrs Newsham a telegram. Deuced lucky I've got that shilling. Won't turn up till late at night, and I'll be rid of her to-morrow. Said in that letter she was only going to stay one night. By Jove! but I shall be awfully hungry grinding for hours on a few buns, for I hadn't half enough luncheon. Had to run away before I had finished a single chop! and I'll be hanged if Emma will let me have any supper in my bedroom!"

CHAPTER VI.

Clara had a very unsatisfactory visit to Sir Jonathan Johnston. He told her she really had nothing the matter with her, gave her no prescription, and did not advise her to call again.

Clara had never been insulted by a doctor before. She was very angry. However, as no third person had been present at the interview, Metternich felt she could give her own account, if necessary, of Sir Jonathan Johnston's "opinion."

Dr Williams-Smith's visit to Adela was far more satisfactory.

Poor Adela was almost in a nervous fever, for her mother had kept her in a state of agitation for a very long time; and it had never so much as entered her innocent young soul, when Clara told her plainly she was in love with George, and going into a rapid consumption, that her mother, for whom she had unbounded respect and fear, was telling her something very like a complete untruth.

It was an agony of shame and awkwardness to the poor young girl to be dragged up from the country

right into George's own house. Her instinctive sense of honour had rebelled against it; and she had had the audacious courage to say to her mother, "If George is in love with me, he can come to Eastcourt. Let him come to me. I hate going to him."

"Adela, I am ashamed of you! How dare you talk in that extraordinary manner?" Clara had silenced her by saying. "You are not going to George. You are going up to town to consult Dr Williams-Smith, and will merely lunch in your Aunt Kate's house. I could not let you see the doctor before luncheon, for fear he should take too gloomy a view of your very, very serious case."

Poor Adela! how this had frightened her. It had frightened her out of her wits, for she had the most healthy horror of dying.

Dread of Dr Williams-Smith and his "opinion," even more than the uncomfortable awkwardness of George, had prevented her from eating any luncheon. She had awaited the doctor in the most highly strung state of nervous agitation, fearing he would certainly say she was going to die. She had been crying before he came.

Mrs Newsham first saw the doctor alone in the small inner drawing-room, with the two doors closed. Adela sat trembling in the larger outer one, giving a short nervous cough every few seconds, and feeling as if she were going to break that dreaded blood-vessel then and there.

When at last the double doors opened, Adela

turned deadly pale and felt faint; and when she tried to stand, her knees shook so that she had to sit down again. She really felt alarmingly ill, and her pulse was all in a flutter.

Dr Williams-Smith was cheerful in manner. "That is because he does not like to tell me I am going to die," thought poor Adela; "but he will tell mamma afterwards in the back drawing-room."

The doctor stethoscoped her. She had been stethoscoped before, but it always frightened her.

"Draw a long breath. Ah! thank you, thank you. Not so very much wrong there, Mrs Newsham," said the doctor.

Adela heard him say this, yet did not feel reassured: it was only a part of his hypocritical cheerfulness. All doctors were alike; old Doseman had been unnaturally cheerful too, and had never told her she was dangerously ill, but he had certainly told mamma. "And Dr Williams-Smith will tell mamma I am dying, but he won't tell me."

The doctor tapped on her chest mysteriously, and examined her thoroughly. Then Mrs Newsham looked at the doctor, and the doctor looked at Mrs Newsham, and Clara walked towards the back drawing-room. Dr Williams-Smith having shaken hands, I can only call it affectionately, with Adela, followed Mrs Newsham.

The awful mystery in the back drawing-room was full of terror to poor Adela. The doctor left by the side-door of the back room, and did not come in a second time to see his trembling patient.

"Dr Williams-Smith says he will call again the day after to-morrow," said Clara, returning to her daughter with a very grave face.

"But oh, mamma! oh! I may go home to-day? I may go home to-day, mamma? I can come back on Wednesday. Do, do let me go home!"

For the moment, the nervous terror of staying on in George's house with George overcame the poor child's fear of death. It was not till her mother said, "You will remain here, Adela, until Dr Williams-Smith has seen you again," and said it in that severely determined manner which always cowed her children, that poor Adela's terror of the awkwardness about George was lost in the greater terror of death.

"Does the doctor think I am . . ." Adela's white lips tried but could not say the hateful word dying. "Does he think I am . . . I am ill?"

"He will give his final opinion the next time he sees you—or the time after," replied Metternich. "Lie down on the sofa, Adela, and rest yourself. Rest is very necessary for you." And she left the room.

To do Clara justice, it had never entered her head that her daughter's imagination had been worked up by herself into the certain expectation of a rapidly consumptive death. She considered Adela devoid of imagination, and altogether too stolidly healthy and sensible for a girl of her age. "It is almost impossible to get an idea into Adela's brain," she had often reflected irritably.

But Clara was not aware that when you have once managed to force a clearly defined conviction into an unimaginative mind, it will stay there for ever unchanged. Imagination has wings of its own, and flies from impression to impression, forgetting the old one in the new; but the mind which does not invent, will hold as an immovable fact the invention, perhaps the passing invention, of another. When people only tell the mere exact truth by accident, they get into the habit of saying a great many little things very useful at the moment, but which they afterwards forget. Clara had been provoked at Adela's dulness of perception and slowness in grasping the fact that she had a lung, and that George was the disease upon that lung, so she had frequently spoken to the girl in a highly exaggerated manner about the delicacy of her chest. And Adela had believed her all the more easily because, from being constantly worried, she had got low and nervous, and this was a strange alarming feeling to her, as she was accustomed to enjoy perfectly smooth, solid, good health.

Clara thought it very desirable Adela should think herself ill enough to lie on the sofa, and feel nervous. The girl was generally so healthily active! It did not suit Metternich's little plans to have Adela trotting about town amusing herself, and getting a good colour and a good appetite, just as if she were quite well.

Adela was feeling so inexpressibly wretched lying on the sofa for the whole afternoon, in perturbed ex-

pectation alike of George and the breaking blood-vessel, that when George's telegram to her mother arrived, the relief of thinking that, at all events, she would be delivered for the evening from the painful discomfort of his presence, was so great that she got a fit of hysterics. Like a true diplomatist, Metternich reserved to herself the right of interpreting the meaning of these tears in the manner best calculated to promote the higher interests of her daughter in the serious matter of matrimony.

George could not stay on at Butt's after half-past ten, and he only managed to remain there so long by craftily entangling old Butt himself in a discussion about a very crabbed question in one of the official examination papers on an expression of Chaucer's. George maintained that a knowledge of such out-of-the-way English was useless to an officer, and only puzzled his spelling for life. Butt was a sure "draw" on this subject; Chaucer put at least five hundred a-year into his pocket, and he always stuck up for him.

George dawdled about the streets till it was a quarter to twelve, and he was dead tired. Luckily he had his latch-key, so he could let himself in without encountering Emma. He took off his boots, and crept up-stairs like a guilty mouse. He was dreadfully hungry, but rushed into bed, not daring to ask for anything to eat, knowing well that Emma would insist upon his having supper down-stairs in the dining-room, and fearing the light, now in the drawing-room, might descend upon him with Mrs Newsham.

George was ravenous next morning. Mrs Newsham appeared at his early breakfast, but Adela stayed in bed by her mother's advice.

Clara could not help being annoyed at George's hearty appetite. He did not even inquire what Dr Williams-Smith had said of Adela, but ate on just as if he had never been told the girl was going into a rapid consumption, and all through secret love of him.

Clara hemmed once or twice to attract George's attention, but the provoking young man ate steadily. He was very glad to be occupied, and not to look at Mrs Newsham.

Clara's mouth tightened, and her face grew stern. She said severely, "George, Dr Williams-Smith must see Adela again before he gives a final opinion of her very"—she laid marked emphasis on the word—"her very serious case. Adela is not coming down to breakfast; she is too ill." As a fact, the lung-opinion had not called the "case" a serious one at all, and it was Mrs Newsham herself had asked him to come again.

At Adela's name, George had dropped the rather large mouthful he held on his fork. He could not help looking up. "Adela still here?" he cried aghast; "I thought she was at Eastcourt!"

Clara raised her downcast lids. She sat exactly opposite George, and the table was a very small one. She looked at him in the way he disliked so much. "Poor Adela!" sighed Metternich, with her eyes on

George,—"poor Adela! but I knew dear Kate would wish her to stay here as long as the doctor might consider it necessary in her very critical state. Dear Kate is always kind, and always, always hospitable."

George winced under these last words; he did feel so guiltily inhospitable himself. Finding no ready answer, he covered his silence by drinking off a whole cup of tea, and he held the cup so that it came between his eyes and that near glance of Clara's. When at last he had to put the cup down again, Mrs Newsham's drooping lids had fallen, and George felt more at ease.

Clara was severely silent. The unpleasant silence soon got so uncomfortable that George spoke, but in a stammering, anxious sort of manner which did not escape Metternich's notice. He said, "Did Sir . . . Sir what's-his-name? think . . . think you very ill also, Mrs Newsham?" He hesitated—then looking away, added rapidly, "Did he say you must stay here a long time too?" George was thinking—I'll cut the whole concern and be off. But it will dish my exam.!

Clara perfectly understood George's transparent anxiety; but though secretly put out with him, she smiled quite pleasantly, and said, "My dear, dear George, what a way to speak of the celebrated Sir Jonathan Johnston! just as if you had never heard of him; for I suppose you do mean Sir Jonathan Johnston?"

George nodded assent. "I mean your man, Mrs Newsham." Then, astonishment momentarily overpowering every other feeling, he exclaimed, "But I wonder,

though, why one doctor could not doctor you both, especially when he is so awfully celebrated and clever."

Metternich said quickly, "Because my case and Adela's are very different. Adela's is much, much more serious than mine. It is a case for a specialist, and Sir Jonathan Johnston is a general practitioner. I grieve to say, George, that poor dear Adela's case is one of threatening decline"—Clara's near glance was again upon the unfortunate young man—"I am sure, George, you would like to ask, but"—very emphatically—"but I would not like to tell you what has brought poor Adela so very rapidly into this most, most alarming state." Now, as Clara well knew, this was of all questions the very last George would wish to ask.

The poor fellow felt as if the Nemesis of murder were upon him. He got up hastily from table. Clara rose too. She had ventured to the extreme edge of prudence; so, laying her hand upon George's arm, she gently detained him, and, looking at him quite kindly, in order to reassure him, said, in the tenderly sympathetic manner with which she invariably speaks of her own health, "So kind of you, my dear George, to have asked what Sir Jonathan Johnston thinks of me! Thank you so very much. I am glad to say that, on the whole, Sir Jonathan's opinion of me was rather more favourable than I had quite dared to expect." And she sighed prettily.

But George was still frightened, and broke away

from Mrs Newsham, and hastily left the room and house. He did not want to be told that Adela was really dying. It was horrible to him to think that, even by accident, he had killed the poor young girl, especially now that he saw she was pretty.

CHAPTER VII.

If you can only make a very young man really believe that a pretty girl is mortally in love with him, you have caught that young man. This is the A B C of the Mother's Fine Art. But it is recognised as such, so the little elementary fiction—for fiction it generally is—can only be resorted to in the very simplest cases, uncomplicated by clear-sighted parents or guardians, and where the young man himself has had no experience of life. A season in the world will open his eyes. Ladies like Clara know this, and that is why they prefer to begin so very, very early with the young men, before others have realised they are at all grown-up.

There is usually no difficulty in managing the young girl, but only the eligible young man. In nine cases out of ten the young lady will fall quite sufficiently in love for your matrimonial arrangements, with the first nice-looking young gentleman who pays her any attention; and if he won't pay her any attention, why, you can always persuade her, as Clara did Adela, that he is secretly in love with her, and that it is admiration of her beauty which makes him so shy.

Now secret love is very, very interesting. It is certainly more interesting than much open devotion. Even Adela, devoid as she was of imagination, could not help feeling this. And then really, when she saw George looking "quite nice," she did not wonder that she, too, was secretly in love with him.

George was much improved in appearance these last few months. He held himself better than he used to do, and he was fast growing out of the awkward lad. The marked improvement was also somewhat owing to Rattles's excellent advice. Rattles had taken George to Poole, and had given Poole *carte-blanche* as to his friend's outfit. George had not yet paid the tailor's bill, but he was wearing the new clothes, and Adela had noticed how smart he looked and what a "nice" figure he undoubtedly had. She had never thought he had a good one before. He was decidedly above the middle height, and she now saw he was "quite nice-looking" too. Not that she had ever considered him ugly, only uninteresting: he was not so uninteresting now. His complexion was much less sunburnt than it had been at Bluehaven, and his dark hair looked "quite nice" on his almost white forehead, and the hair was cut in exactly the right way. Adela had particularly noticed this; that was just the sort of little thing she always did notice, and thought a great deal of. She had fancied, too, that his hair was darker than of old, and had blushed on thinking so, because her mother had been careful to tell her that dark-haired young men invariably fall in love with

very, very fair girls—in fact, George's dark hair and deep-brown eyes alone seemed to prove he must be in love with her fair beauty.

Adela had seen a great deal in those two furtive glances at luncheon yesterday. It was curious how much she had seen which had never struck her before. In this she was just like George, for he had seen more in his two glances than he had done all the years of his life. Perhaps Adela's most important discovery was that George had really "quite nice" eyes—"quite nice" was her favourite expression, and she never felt the desire to use a warmer or more enthusiastic one.

George's soft brown eyes had looked at her kindly, and almost, she had thought, with a sort of tender fear; and when her mother had read out that part about her health in the letter to Aunt Kate, she had felt George saw she was dying, and was sorry for her. He could not have looked at her as he did if he were not very, very sorry. And it was kind of him to be sorry—yes, it was very kind.

As a rule, Adela required almost as little sympathy as she ever gave; but the growing terror of an early death was more than she could bear alone, so she was becoming sensitive to sympathy. She was glad to feel George cared about her dying. It was so dreadful to die young! Oh! must she indeed die soon? was there no help anywhere? would no one give her hope?

It was then that one of the many curious things "mamma" had said of late, rushed back across her mind. She remembered how her mother had told her

in a mysterious way that Dr Doseman thought she would get well if George proposed to her. There was hope in this, because she had lately been reading a novel called 'He Knew it Not.' Her mother had given it to her to read. In it the heroine, who had been secretly in love during the first volume, and had broken a blood-vessel and got a brain-fever in the second, was left quite well at the end of the third, simply through marrying the hero, a "magnificently ugly man," though he had been a great deal queerer to the poor girl, Adela reflected, than George had ever been to her; for so little did the magnificently ugly man know he was in love with the young lady that he had married—yes, actually married—quite another person —a handsome woman with curiously dark eyebrows, and suspected of forgery, rightly as it turned out, for she really had forged a codicil to her father's will. This wife was killed in a railway accident, and the proofs of the forgery were found in the pocket of her under-petticoat; and all this luckily happened just at the time of the broken blood-vessel and the brain-fever, so that the hero was at liberty to restore to health and happiness the heroine who had never forged or done anything but love him secretly, and break her blood-vessel and get her brain-fever solely for his sake. The wonderful effect of matrimony on the broken blood-vessel much impressed Adela, unaccustomed as she was to novel-reading, and therefore ignorant of the beneficial effect of matrimony when it comes quite at the end of the third volume.

Adela had a natural distaste for reading, but she did not dislike this book. She had read it attentively and with interest, though slowly, because she always did read very slowly. She had believed every word of it, and was quite sure the people were certainly alive, and had said and done in real life all they said and did in the novel. To the unimaginative and commonplace, there is everything in fiction but the fiction. If they recognise a personal description at all like any one they have ever known, or find a turn of speech they have heard, or one or two traits of character they have vaguely noticed, they will believe a real man or woman has been taken bodily out of life and "put in a book." They think this the easiest thing in the world to do! and they forthwith cap some one they know with a forgery he is incapable of, or preposterous things he has never said or done; and though he may be the best of husbands, they will believe the author thinks he is wicked enough to run away from his wife, if the plot requires the man in the novel to be a flirt. The idea that a character is like a many-storied house built on quite a little piece of ground cannot be grasped by them; still less the fact that it takes many hints from many persons, and not merely little pickings from one, to make one man or woman seem alive in a book. The lady who caps herself with a character in fiction may be capping on herself tit-bits from her mortal enemy, and so may the man; but a man is rarely silly enough to cap himself in real life with the picturesque bits

out of a dozen fools, mostly imaginary ones. He leaves that sort of common-sense to his wife.

There are some to whom a novel seems to be exactly like one of those *Catch-'em-all-alive-O!* fly-papers—the author just simply sticks real people on his pages, like living midges, blue-bottles, and wasps. Kind friends will always kindly try to recognise the wasps.

The heroine in 'He Knew it Not' had lightish hair and a young gentleman secretly fixed upon one lung. George could not be called a magnificently ugly man, and yet what a very, very remarkable coincidence this was! The hair might have been some shades lighter, and the eyes bluer, and there ought to have been a description of a very pretty foot. All the same, if Adela had known the author, or even seen him once or twice in a morning visit, she would have been quite, quite sure he had "put her in his book." Now, as the heroine was not described as absolutely faultless, and as she was made to say what Adela was sure she never would have said, and to do many things Adela never had done, and never, never could have done, she would have felt the character, though perfectly scandalously unlike her, was certainly herself. And such was her mental calibre, that she would have told everybody it was herself. It is true Adela had not yet broken her blood-vessel, like the girl in the novel, but Dr Doseman and Dr Williams-Smith, and, above all, "mamma," knew she would break it soon.

Metternich had done cleverly right in giving her daughter this novel to read. She had really proved herself a diplomatist of remarkable talent, for what with one little clever device and what with another, she had undoubtedly managed to create a sort of tender delusion between two stolid young people whose very last idea, if left to themselves, would have been to imagine they were either of them in love.

George had found a few pence on his dressing-table, but no more money anywhere, for with the kind help of Rattles he had come quite to the end of his allowance. He again bought some buns and lunched on them, but felt he could not do without his dinner another night. He had a headache, and was not up to his usual "grind." The want of "tin" made it impossible for him to leave town, and "cut the whole concern."

So towards seven o'clock he came to the conclusion that he might as well go home to dinner, and face Mrs Newsham that night, as he would have to face her the next and for many nights to come, as he now expected she would certainly stay on till the end of the week; for though her "man" might not want to keep her much longer in town, Adela's "man" evidently meant to go on doctoring her, as he thought her so alarmingly ill—quite as ill as old Doseman had ever said she was. Perhaps old Doseman was not such a fool after all. A horrid idea then entered poor George's head: was Adela going to die—actually to die in his house?

He wished his stepmother would come home, and he thought he would write to her on Sunday. George was very slow about letter-writing, and would go through a great deal before he went to that trouble. When he did write, it was always on a Sunday, because he had nearly the whole day to write his letter in.

As George walked back to Chapel Street on that memorable evening, he was wondering all the way if he should have to dine alone with Mrs Newsham. If he had had the money, he would have bought a large plant to put in the middle of the uncomfortably small dinner-table, for he had felt the want at breakfast of some solid protection from Mrs Newsham's near glance.

"I don't mind if a person is always looking at you," thought George. "Why, there's Rattles, who can't say two words without looking you straight in the face. He invariably looks at you when you speak to him, and it feels quite natural. But what I do mind is a pair of awfully mysterious eyelids, dropped down as if they had deep secrets behind them, and then when a fellow is quite off his guard, going up suddenly, and two eyes looking through him. Deuced unpleasant!" So George actually began to wish Adela might come down to dinner. He felt there would be less discomfort in her presence than in a *tête-à-tête* with her mother. "Mrs Newsham could not say the sort of things she said at breakfast if Adela were by."

As Adela was not yet in the very act of dying, she did come down to dinner that night, and George

thought her looking less mortally ill than he had expected. This was some relief to the unfortunate young man's horribly disturbed mind, though, on first meeting Adela, he had thought he should have preferred after all to be alone with Mrs Newsham, for Adela got white and red, and her emotion made George colour too, and there were Mrs Newsham's two eyes "awfully" alive and watching them both.

Adela's manner to George at dinner was constrained and cold, as if she were offended with him, and thought he had been unkind to her. Feeling this, George wished to be kind, and tried to speak to her. He hoped she was better?

Adela answered shortly, "Quite well, thank you," as if angry with him for speaking to her, then instantly began to cry.

Clara did not seem to see these tears, and poor George, not knowing what to say, remained silent; but he was thinking, "Adela considers me a brute. Perhaps I am a brute."

George did not speak any more to Adela at dinner, and she never once spoke to him. The truth is, she had again been told by Clara to be very, very cold to George, and she was painfully aware her mother narrowly watched her. She ate nothing. George could not help eating, because he was so very hungry; but he did not eat half enough, for he felt Mrs Newsham's near glance perpetually upon him, and she seemed to see him eat with ill-concealed disgust. There was no doubt she too considered him a brute,

and a brute with a heartless ferocious appetite. Clara generally had a very good appetite herself; indeed her appetite, like her pulse, was surprising in so fair and frail a creature, constantly obliged to consult the doctors. But this evening she would hardly eat a thing, though George pressed the dishes upon her with anxious eagerness. He did feel such a savage, eating hungrily when no one else had any appetite! as a man might if suddenly, still carnal and unchanged, he found himself amongst the angels.

Mrs Newsham's whole time at table seemed to be occupied in making George feel thoroughly uncomfortable—at least the unfortunate young man thought so. "It is quite clear she is angry with me, and thinks I have behaved badly to Adela. She was civil enough to me at first; but perhaps that doctor has been here again this afternoon, and is now quite sure Adela is going to die quickly." And he longed, but did not dare, to ask if Dr Williams-Smith had called again. He could see, from Adela's tears, that she was very much afraid of dying, and did not like the subject mentioned. It was hard on Adela to die young! George was not usually sympathetic, but here was a feeling into which he could enter; he himself would hate to die till he was quite old.

George did not intend to go up-stairs after dinner and spend the evening in the drawing-room. He meant to stay on in the dining-room all by himself, with an examination paper on the table, and 'Jorrocks's Hunt' hidden in the big arm-chair. If Mrs

Newsham should descend upon him, he had determined to carry Jorrocks and that "Chaucer humbug" up to his bedroom, though he knew Emma would not let him have a fire there.

George had settled all this in his own mind during second course; but what he could not arrange to his own satisfaction with any certainty beforehand was, what it might please Mrs Newsham to do.

His secret anxiety was agreeably relieved when, without sitting half as long at dessert as he had feared she might, Mrs Newsham rose from table, and said, with a return of that charm of manner for which she is celebrated, "Now, my dear George, Adela and I will leave you. And remember, we shall not afterwards inquire if you have smoked a cigar."

Adela looked so surprised to see her mother really good-humoured again, that George noticed the astonishment in her face. "Adela did not think her mother would go up-stairs so pleasantly or so soon," thought George.

The instant he found himself alone, he began clearing the dessert dishes from the table, for he was afraid, if he rang the bell, Emma might be upon him. He arranged the pen, the ink, and the examination paper before him; then out came Jorrocks. But just at that very moment Mrs Newsham's voice sounded on the staircase calling him in dire alarm. George fancied he heard the word "fire!" but he may have been mistaken. He rushed up-stairs. Mrs Newsham was calling loudly from the back drawing-

room. But after all it was not the house that was on fire; it was only the wick of a lamp which had been turned too high.

"I told mamma she was turning it up too high," said Adela, who was standing calmly by.

Whereupon Clara ordered her sharply to go and lie down upon the sofa in the outer room.

"Adela knows nothing whatever about these lamps," said Mrs Newsham to George; "and I know very little either. All I do know is that mineral oils are quite horribly dangerous, and quite frightfully inflammable! My dear George, I was certain we were going to have some fearful explosion. Paraffin is always a terror to me." And Clara did seem much agitated. "My dear George, my dear George, I am trembling all over! I will run up-stairs and get my smelling-salts, and take a few drops of sal-volatile, to recover myself before I go in and sit with poor dear Adela." She dropped her voice impressively,—"I dare not, I dare not let her see I am agitated. She might faint dead! or—or get a nervous seizure. She got a most serious one yesterday when your telegram came: she was so disappointed you were not coming home to dinner."

Poor George coloured at this. He was dismayed to see Mrs Newsham was actually leaving the room. He had such a horror of woman's faints and nerves! They puzzled and distressed him, and were altogether hateful to him. "I will ring for her maid and Emma," he said, promptly.

Clara turned round, and ran back with surprising

agility, considering she was all of a tremble, and wanted smelling-salts and sal-volatile. She caught George's hand just as it touched the bell. "Are you mad?" she asked, with mingled severity and indignation—"are you mad, George?" Then she said in an impressively mysterious undertone, "Adela would think she was dying if you rang for the maids, and the sudden shock might be . . ."

In justice to Clara, it must be allowed she hesitated before she said the word "fatal." But she did say it, though in a very low voice—so low that I am doubtful whether you ought to consider she told a complete fib. I rather think it was only half a one; and I am sure she thought so herself.

"Fatal!" stammered poor George, repeating aloud what had been breathed to him in a whisper.

"Hush! hush!" murmured Mrs Newsham, glancing ominously towards her daughter.

But it was evident Adela had heard the word "fatal." The deadly pallor of her face betrayed the fact. The truth is, this second mystery in the back drawing-room frightened poor Adela out of her wits just as much as the first one; for on catching the word "fatal" she felt convinced mamma was telling George what Dr Williams-Smith had told mamma in private, but what mamma thought far too dreadful to tell her.

Clara drew George behind the folding-door. Her manner had changed to the softly maternal. "Now you really, really must watch over poor dear Adela,

just for one, one short moment, while I am up-stairs." And in quite a tender whisper she purred to him, just as if he had been a doctor, "My dear George, my dear George! you must not be rough to the poor child. You must be gentle—quite, quite gentle. And do not, do not on *any* account, let her see you dislike her to stay in your house for a day or two longer."

George blushed scarlet; for he was very hospitable by nature. Clara saw she was on the right tack, so continued, still purring, "I rather do think poor dear Adela does fancy, my dear George, that you do dislike her being here. Remember she is very ill; and sick people are always just a little sensitive. I fear it is very, very painful to poor dear Adela even to imagine she is trespassing on your hospitality, and perhaps driving you again to dine out of your house, as you did yesterday."

"Then they knew my sapping on at Butt's was all a sham!" thought George. But before he could answer Mrs Newsham was gone. And he found himself left alone to take care of Adela.

The kindly young man had been stung to the quick by the imputation cast upon his hospitality; for he felt there was truth in it, and was ashamed to have betrayed his secret feelings so clearly. And he had thought himself so clever in concealing them! It went against his grain to act inhospitably to any one; but it was painful and humiliating to his feelings as a gentleman to think he could have done so towards a pretty young girl, whom he now believed was unfor-

tunately in love with him, and in love unto death! What a fool he had been to avoid her in so marked a manner at Bluehaven! for his conscience did tell him he had avoided her on purpose, and not by accident. "I ought to have treated her just like Nellie, and then I should not have put myself so horribly in the wrong." Owing to the genius of Metternich, George was at last convinced he had put himself in the wrong.

George Crofton was shy by nature; and it is much more difficult for shy people to do the right thing easily than for those happy beings like Rattles, who do not know what shyness means. But George was no coward at heart, and could do a disagreeable thing courageously, if not gracefully. He felt he was going to do what was very unpleasant, when he stalked somewhat stiffly into the same room with Adela, and sat down on a chair sufficiently far off from her not to be uncomfortably near, and yet near enough for him to say easily what he had made up his mind to say.

Adela was no longer lying down on the sofa. She was sitting straight upright in the corner farthest away from George. It was a Chesterfield sofa, with square ends.

Adela looked stiff and white and cold; but inwardly she was in a state of highly strung nervous agitation; for she felt "mamma" had left her alone on purpose that she might be proposed to by George. She was sure of this. That was a painful moment to the young girl. She looked down upon the floor, and nervously held her breath.

"Adela," said George, also looking down on the carpet, "I hope you don't really think I . . . I dislike . . . I mean I don't like having you here. I am awfully sorry I . . . I didn't seem as glad as I ought to have done—awfully! But I am an awkward fellow, Adela," he said, penitently. "You . . . you shouldn't mind me. If I had thought you would have been sorry, I wouldn't have sent that telegram yesterday. But it wasn't you I funked dining with, Adela, but only Mrs Newsham. I . . . I thought you were at Eastcourt."

No sooner had these words escaped his lips than George felt he had stumbled on the wrong thing. Heartily ashamed of his awkward bungling, he looked up and saw the blush he felt all over his own face mantling painfully on Adela's cheek. She looked up, then quickly down again, and reddening more and more, said hurriedly, "I did not go to Eastcourt, because Dr Williams-Smith wanted to see me again. Perhaps . . . perhaps I may go home to-morrow."

"No, no!" exclaimed George, very warmly; for he was disgusted with himself. "No, no! Adela, you shall not go! I am not quite the brute you think me."

He got up, walked a few hurried steps towards the window, turned and stood still behind the sofa.

Adela, feeling him so near, instinctively moved a little forward. George saw the motion, slight as it was, and he was piqued by it. He had put one hand upon the high-backed couch; he withdrew it.

"It is not kind of you to say you will go home,"

said he, quickly; "as if I were an inhospitable brute, and did not wish you to stay as long as the doctor thinks you ought."

Repentance, which is so often sour in age, can be a tenderly relenting kindness where the feelings have not yet grown old, and to have been if only just a little hard, will make some hearts too soft.

"Adela!" said George, losing in fresh feeling the instinct which a minute before had made him draw back his hand. He leant again upon the sofa, and bending towards the young girl, added, in a voice which she thought was very kind—"Believe me, Adela—for it is hard not to believe a fellow when he is telling the truth—believe me, I never meant to be a brute. I am awfully sorry you are so very, very ill—I am awfully sorry, Adela."

The first few kindly spoken words had been pleasant to Adela, for they had sounded as if George were forgiving her for having come uninvited to his house; but the last ones had thrilled her painfully, awakening, as they did, the strongest feeling in her young heart—the great fear of death. It gave her a shock to hear from George's own lips that he believed she was very, very ill; everyone seemed to believe it, so it must be true. She must indeed be dying, there could be no doubt of it. Adela turned very, very pale; large tears filled her blue eyes, and rolled down her cheeks. She was trembling very much.

Suddenly, with the overpowering impulse of a young thing longing passionately for life, and hating death,

she turned round, put her hand on George's arm, and clasping it as if it might be he could save her, cried—"Can no one save me from dying? George, I don't want to die." Her eyes grew big with terror. "I hate to die! I hate it! You would hate it too, George, if they told you you were dying!"

Strong emotion makes people so very real—as human as we ever feel ourselves to be. George forgot he had once thought Adela a mere wax-doll.

Yes; he would hate to die himself, so full of health and life and hope was he! His kind ingenuous eyes looked down very sympathetically into poor Adela's troubled ones; and as he looked, he felt the sort of emotion a man might feel if he had cruelly wounded some tame white dove, or too fond creature that never did him any harm, and only loved him. A wounded creature we never thought could have a soul will turn and look at us in terror or in death, and move our very heart with a pained sympathy we did not dream we ever could have felt. There had never been so much expression in Adela's fair face before—her eyes, so sadly full of that wistful longing to live, were very touching, and they touched George. The young girl's hand was still upon his arm, and George placed his own free hand on that little, trembling, clinging one.

"Poor Adela!" he said most gently, consoling her tenderly, as big strong men who are kind will comfort a child. "You must not die; you must get well. Dear Adela, you will not die! You are too young,

younger than I am, and I feel I could not die while I am young. If a doctor told me I was dying, I would not believe him."

George spoke with strong conviction, for there is no belief like that of a young man who feels within himself the power to live till he is quite, quite old.

But Adela seemed heedless of the joyful hope in his words, and only softly, shyly sensible of his tender manner. The pale face, which had been gazing so intently at him, was now turned away. George could not be so very kind—he could not care so much about her being ill and dying, more than any one else had ever seemed to care—unless what "mamma" had said was quite true, and he indeed did love her. The certainty of his love had come to Adela with the kind touch of his hand; his voice, too, had moved her. It was then a little true love stole, for the first time, into the young girl's heart, as a wee fairy might steal at peep of day into a flower first opening in the early morning dew to life.

George bent still lower, so as to see the half-hidden face. The blushes were bright roses on the cheek; the fair neck was blushing too.

Was it the enlightening power of Clara's genius that had awakened the young man? or was it some instinct born within him which seemed to reveal to him so clearly the real meaning of Adela's blushes and soft distress?

For he understood them, or else thought he did, and smiled as if well pleased to think he might bring

joy where as yet he had given pain. He did feel very, very kindly towards Adela, and now that he saw she was so pretty, her girlish beauty touched him as her eyes had done.

Bending just a little lower over her, and smiling, he whispered in her ear, much as if they were both children again, and he were telling her some pretty secret—"Adela, we did not know we were in love at Bluehaven; but we were, and we know it now. It was all so awfully new to us that we did not understand it one bit!" Then he added, very softly indeed, for her trembling agitation moved him much—"Dear Adela, I know, I know you love me!"

Her heart was beating as it had never beat before, and she murmured very tenderly in return—"Yes, George, I know I love you. You are so kind, so kind!" And with the pretty secret still breathing in her ear, she bent her little head to hide her deepening blushes.

At that moment Clara entered the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

METTERNICH found herself in the curious position of a diplomatist embarrassed by her own success. Having got George's proposal—as a proposal she treated it—she had suddenly to face the idea that her conduct might be viewed in two lights. She had not thought of this before; she thought deeply of it now, and wondered at herself, and felt indignant she had not sooner considered the misconstruction it might be possible to place upon the scene and circumstances of the proposal. It was then Clara learnt this valuable lesson: when you are going to do a shady action, take the most elaborate precautions with your surrounding circumstances, and arrange them carefully beforehand, so that they must place your action in a favourable light. Never leave your surrounding circumstances to an after-chance.

Clara now felt that George's proposal ought not to have been made in George's own house when George was there unprotected and alone, and she imagined with unflinching courage the sort of opinion Sir Cuthbert Crofton was likely to hold upon this subject if

ever the awkward fact should come to his knowledge, —for she allowed to herself it was an awkward fact. She did not shrink from placing it in the cross light. She was far too clever to be a coward.

So Metternich contemplated her own diplomacy at a distance, and her mind stood like a dispassionate stranger outside herself, and showed her the mistakes she had made, then suggested new ideas of what she might have done instead. One idea rose daringly to the thought that Kate should have been at home in Chapel Street, and not away, and George have been made to propose quite by accident in spite of her. Kate, as a surrounding circumstance, would have changed to the world the whole aspect of George's entirely unexpected proposal. "There was a time," thought Clara, "when I could have managed matters just as easily with Kate in the house as out of it; but that was before she fell under the pernicious influence of that hateful man, Sir Cuthbert." Mrs Newsham hated Sir Cuthbert, not only for what she knew he had divined, but for what she felt he might and would divine.

Clara's mind, still standing critically outside her past diplomacy, next imagined how, in default of Kate, it would have done to have used Admiral Crofton as a surrounding circumstance. "No doubt he too has been prejudiced by that intriguing Sir Cuthbert; but the Admiral is very soft-hearted, and I could make him think me just as charming as ever in five minutes!" Clara smiled a sweetly pretty smile,

for she was a charming woman, and she knew it. "Any one can get round the Admiral! He may be a little restive and troublesome at times, for he is like a young child, and wants to be managed. But now really I do think I might have had him in the house! He would have looked well to the world, and I am sure I could have managed him. The dear Admiral! He is so very, very innocent!" And Clara's tenderness for the guileless sailor began to revive, and her fertile mind forthwith imagined five different schemes, by any one of which she might have hoodwinked the dear old creature into an invaluable surrounding circumstance. What a fool she had been! She was disgusted with the naked baldness of her own diplomacy.

But Clara was not the woman to lose precious time in useless imagination and vain regret. She lost none; for it is incredible with what rapidity her mind can work. Why, the five different ways in which she could have hoodwinked the Admiral did not occupy her imagination more than three-quarters of an hour! Metternich got through all her thinking on the very night of George's proposal.

She was quite fresh next morning, rose early, and was decidedly up to the mark in her interview with George. She saw him alone.

She began by saying to him, in the kindest little manner possible—

"My dear George, my dear George! you know I never, *never* have flattered you! but I must say I *do*

think Adela will have a husband who will be all in all to her—everything that I could wish." Clara thought George started a little at the word *husband*, as if he had not perhaps quite realised his position. But she went on, "And I will say too—yes, my dear George, though I am her mother—I will say I do consider you a *very* fortunate man in having secured the affections of a sweet little loving creature like dear Adela. Her whole heart is yours! solely and entirely yours! and indeed, indeed George, she will be a very devoted little wife." Clara did say this very prettily.

But George seemed uneasy. His discomfort was not lost upon Metternich.

"And, thinking as I do," she said, "that there never were two people so exactly made for each other as you and Adela, you must indeed be at a loss to imagine, my dear George, why I ever, ever was against this match; for I was much against it at one time."

"Against the match!" exclaimed George, and his ingenuous eyes opened widely. "I——"

Clara cut him short with the utmost rapidity. "Rockhurst told you I had been against it. You know he did," she said.

George then remembered Rockhurst had said something of the sort, but he could not recollect exactly what.

Clara repeated, as if determined her question should be answered, "You know I was against this match, George? Rockhurst told you so. You must remember he told you so?"

"Well, I think I do," replied George, trying to be quite truthful. "I recollect in a sort of way. But he could not have said much about it, Mrs Newsham, because I remember quite well what——"

"It was not necessary to say much about it, George," put in Clara very quickly. "The mere fact was sufficient. But I will tell you plainly, George, I was *very* much against this match; and in one sense I am so still, because I foresee such a very, very long engagement, and as a rule I completely disapprove of long engagements. Nothing—no! nothing—would make me consent to this engagement but the conviction that the disappointment would certainly kill poor Adela. Now, my dear George"—Clara became extremely kind again—"my dear George, you know very, very well what a real affection I have for you, and how intensely convinced I am that you will prove *the* best and kindest of husbands; but I do wish, my dear boy—I do wish there was a little money somewhere! Adela will not have much fortune, and really, my dear George, I cannot conscientiously say you have any real prospects at all." Clara glanced curiously at George; but it was evident he had not consulted the Shropwich doctor, and did not know his uncle was dying. "Yet, my dear boy, people must have something to live on; they positively must!"

George agreed to this with a readiness of apprehension he had not shown before, and which Clara particularly remarked. "Awfully true! awfully! A fellow can't live on nothing. I've found that out since I've

been at Butt's. It takes lots of money to get on properly—lots!"

"I *am* glad to see you so sensible, my dear George," cried Metternich effusively. "I am glad! for I know you will quite understand an engagement is the only thing possible. And, really, you are both so young that there can be no good reason for your settling down quite immediately."

"And I wouldn't like it!" exclaimed George, with much decision. The emotion he had felt a short moment the day before had cooled considerably. "I should dislike awfully to settle down till I have seen the world and shot some big game. I mean to go to India in my long leave, and to America; and Rattles says it does not cost much if you are a bachelor. Rattles has advised me not to marry until I am a colonel: he is not going to marry himself till he is a colonel and has got a regiment, and can do the thing in some sort of style, though there are two awfully pretty girls in love with him."

"Pray, who is this Rattles?" asked Clara, stiffly. She was decidedly displeased that George should have an intimate adviser.

"Rattles? He is an awfully jolly fellow—that's who he is," said George, warmly; "he's my great chum. He is out of town now, or I'd introduce him to you. And I'm awfully cut up about him, for I heard this morning he has had a fall and has broken two ribs and his collar-bone, and won't be back at Butt's for an awful long time. I am awfully sorry he is away, for you and he

would agree awfully well, Mrs Newsham, because he has advised me over and over again not to marry till I am a colonel. Not that I ever looked upon myself as a marrying man. But Rattles always did. He bet me fifty to one I'd get engaged somehow before I was twenty-one, and he won't be a bit surprised to hear you are here, Mrs Newsham. He was always chaffing me about you and Adela, and so were all the fellows at Butt's. They'll chaff me awfully to-day when I tell them I've got engaged at last."

Metternich was so taken aback at this that she turned quite white. It was her nature to pale with emotion. But she did not lose her presence of mind.

"I am astonished at you, George!" she said—"astonished! I can hardly believe my ears! Yet I am forced to believe you actually had the intention of announcing your engagement as a settled fact to all the strange young men at your tutor's, when Adela's father—one of the principal people concerned—her own father—has not been consulted on the matter, not so much as even asked to give his consent."

"Mr Newsham? By Jove, I forgot him!" said the astonished George, naively; "but I say, Mrs Newsham, he is sure to consent if you do?"

"Nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Clara, angrily; "nothing of the sort. You have no fortune whatever, and it is most unlikely he will consent at all. At any rate, the least you can do, as a gentleman, is to keep the whole matter a profound secret until his consent has been asked and given. You do not seem

aware that an engagement once announced cannot be broken off without casting an enduring slur upon the young lady. Thomas is coming up to town in a day or two to vote on the Dozen Drunkards Bill, and I will speak to him then. But in the meantime I insist —I absolutely insist, George—that you promise me, on your honour as a gentleman, not to mention the matter to a single human being."

Naturally enough George promised faithfully what Mrs Newsham asked, and promised "on his honour as a gentleman."

And then Clara added that, as Adela had apparently been made the butt of a set of joking young men, "seemingly without the elements of gentlemanly feeling or good taste," she was forced—positively forced—for her daughter's sake, still further to insist that George should tell no one—and she could make no exception to the rule, but simply insist he should tell *no one* that she and "poor" Adela had been obliged, by a perfectly unforeseen accident, to ask his hospitality for two nights. She ended by saying very coldly she would trespass no longer on that hospitality, and much regretted to have trespassed so long.

The unfortunate George had then to say a great many civil things he would not have said otherwise, and, blundering from one polite speech into another, committed himself to much more than he intended. He never clearly knew how it was he came to promise he would not breathe a word about his engagement to

his stepmother till Mr Newsham's consent had been obtained.

"Until then," Clara said, severely, "I do not consider there is *any* engagement between you and Adela," —but she was careful to add—"though I naturally think you are undoubtedly bound to her in honour. When a young man has engaged the affections of a girl, and has said to her what you have said to Adela, he is bound to her by the most sacred ties of honour."

Clara said these words so impressively that George could not help thinking she had very exalted ideas of honour. And so she had—in everybody, except perhaps herself.

In the course of this conversation it had struck Metternich that really after all nobody need ever know she had taken her daughter uninvited into George's house, and that George had proposed to Adela there. She had rapidly settled she would immediately move into the Alexandra Hotel, and be found consulting the doctors there by all her acquaintance. No one yet knew she was in town. In due time she would announce the engagement from the Alexandra Hotel. Then why need it ever transpire she and Adela had first consulted the doctors in Chapel Street?

In an incredibly short time Clara and Adela and the maid and the luggage had migrated to the Alexandra Hotel. The ladies had a good deal of luggage—indeed, when you think Clara had only intended staying just one night in town because Sir Jonathan Johnston could not see her till late on that Monday afternoon, and that

Adela had not meant to remain there at all, but had been quite, quite unexpectedly detained by Dr Williams-Smith, the amount of these ladies' luggage was certainly a little surprising—that is, if the large trunks of lovely woman can ever really surprise any one.

Next day there was a paragraph in the 'Morning Post' stating "that Mrs and Miss Newsham had arrived at the Alexandra Hotel from Eastcourt, Nossex."

I have often wondered if it was Clara herself put that announcement in the paper, but have never been able to find out.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs Newsham and Adela had spent nearly a fortnight at the Alexandra Hotel before the Dozen Drunkards Bill came on in the House. Clara had had no difficulty in getting Thomas to pair on three rather important occasions: he paired for the Government against the Large Towns and Dockyards Defences Bill; also for the Government against the Bill for the introduction of a Limited Number of Full Grown Men into the Regular Army; and he was content to pair for the Government on their Foreign Policy, although that policy had then left this country without a single ally in Europe. Thomas was a steady, trustworthy Liberal, but he was also essentially a conscientious man. He never did what he thought wrong, and he would have considered it wrong to vote on so important a matter as the Dozen Drunkards Bill without hearing and carefully weighing all that might be said on both sides. Thomas would have had the courage to have voted against every member of his party on this vital question; but luckily for Clara's ambition, there was no

chance of his having to vote dead against his coronet. Though the Dozen Drunkards Bill was not quite made a Cabinet question, as Thomas thought it ought to be, the measure was the petted hobby of two distinguished Ministers, who were both of opinion that if you can only amuse the philanthropic constituent at home by letting him interfere with somebody else's liberty, property, or drink, you may bungle matters as you like all over Europe and the world.

There were many excellent people, and Thomas was one of them, who considered it of vital importance to the Higher Interests of the British Empire, that in whatever parish a dozen convictions for drunkenness per thousand inhabitants were proved in a year, all public-houses in that parish should be closed between the hours of twelve and one, or of half-past eleven and half-past one. The principle of the Dozen Drunkards Bill was accepted by all its supporters as unquestionably sound—they merely differed on the so-called Greater Extension clause. Thomas inclined to the half-past eleven and half-past one party, as these hours would make it impossible for any working man to take his mid-day meal in a public-house. Twelve to one would not cover all possibilities.

Mr Newsham meant to speak on the Greater Extension clause. Now Thomas was always extraordinarily preoccupied even for his preoccupied self, and very nervous when he was going to make a speech. He would write most of it out beforehand, and then be in perpetual terror of forgetting it.

Clara had the best of excuses for not telling Thomas of Adela's engagement until after he had made his speech. And George quite agreed with her that it was useless to speak to Mr Newsham while he had the Dozen Drunkards on his mind.

Metternich was anxious to put off the announcement of her daughter's engagement as long as possible, for she had conceived the brilliant idea of making Thomas himself the principal surrounding circumstance of the proposal. She had now arranged the proposal should appear to the world to be made at the Alexandra Hotel quite accidentally *in her own absence.* So she had settled to go down to Eastcourt for a few days, "just to look after Miss Smith and the younger girls," whilst Adela was left with her father in town "under" Dr Williams-Smith.

Clara told Thomas it would not be absolutely necessary for her to see Sir Jonathan Johnston till the end of the following week, but that Adela must remain under the care of Dr Williams-Smith,—"for I rejoice to say dear Adela is quite recovering her health under the excellent treatment of Dr Williams-Smith." But Thomas hardly seemed to grasp what Clara said, or to realise Adela had been ill. Never were the finer shades of diplomacy so lost upon a man. When Clara spoke to him he only said, "Ah!" as if quite absorbed in the pleased contemplation of his drunkards; and then added still more absently, "Yes, yes, yes!"

Before leaving town Clara had a little *tête-à-tête* with George. She said to him, "My dear George, it

certainly is unfortunate I must go away and cannot stay here just two days longer. The debate is likely to be on Thursday, or on Friday at the latest, and I do think Mr Newsham ought to be spoken to the very moment his mind is disengaged. Do you know, my dear George, I have been thinking very seriously, very seriously indeed, what would be the most honourable, straightforward, and really right way for you to act, and I have quite come to the conclusion it is you, and you alone, who should propose for Adela to Mr Newsham. You should plead your own cause."

"But I should do it awfully badly, awfully!" cried the ardent lover. "You would do it much better than I could, for you would know what to say—I'm blowed if I should! Besides, I'm going in for my Exam. on Monday, and Butt says I must keep my head awfully clear and cool, and think of nothing else, or I'll be plucked to a dead certainty."

"Then you must propose for Adela on Saturday," Clara said with much decision.

"But you are not going away for long, Mrs Newsham, and there can be no great hurry about Mr Newsham; and I won't know the right thing to say to him, and I'm awfully sure he won't know what to say to me unless you are here—I'm awfully sure of that!"

There was a dogged persistence in the otherwise tractable George which Clara did not like. She began to think there might be more character in him, if once allowed to take the lead, than she had suspected at first. And she repeated peremptorily, "George, you

will propose for Adela on Saturday. You will not wait till Monday. I insist upon your proposing on Saturday. The House won't be sitting on Saturday afternoon, so you will speak to Mr Newsham then."

"Hang it, I'd rather write!" said George, irritably.

Clara reflected rapidly on this idea, and thought it a good one.

"But, I say!" instantly exclaimed George, aghast, —"I say, by Jove! I'm an awfully bad letter-writer! Awfully difficult sort of letter to write, too!"

"Not at all, my dear George; not at all." And the charming woman reappeared in Clara sweetly smiling. "You need not say much, my dear George. In fact, the shorter the better."

George brightened just a little at this, for at any rate it was a relief to think the letter might be a short one.

"It is so very, very easy to write a few short words," Clara continued. "Why, you really need not say more than: 'My dear Mr Newsham,—I feel it easier to write than to speak to you on a matter I have warmly at heart. I wish to propose to you for Adela, because I am very, very much in love with her, and I dare to think she loves me a little too——'"

"But, I say, Mrs Newsham!" interrupted George, —"I say, Adela is awfully in love with me! You know she is."

"Quite, quite right. But, my dear George, my dear George! there is a small social etiquette in

delicate little matters of this kind. My dear boy" —Clara was very charming indeed—"my dear boy, when you have been just a little more in the world, you will know it is not considered quite, quite the right thing for a gentleman to proclaim that a young lady is very, very much in love with him, no matter how madly in love she really may be. This is only a little point of social etiquette, just like wearing a white tie in the evening and never in the morning. People must conform to the little rules of society if they don't want to be laughed at; so, my dear George, I really should advise you never to say to anybody that Adela was dying of love for you. It does not make a young man ridiculous to say he is in love with a girl, but it does make him so very, very funny to proclaim the young lady is violently in love with him! Oh, my dear George, my dear George, how very, very funny people would think you, to be sure!" And Clara was exceedingly merry over the idea.

George was exactly at the age when a young man is acutely sensitive to ridicule. It actually made him blush to think any one might laugh at him. Mrs Newsham's amused merriment made him most uncomfortable. He certainly did not wish to say or do anything silly; and proposing was altogether such a disagreeable bother and puzzle to him, that he was determined to leave the matter entirely to Mrs Newsham; so he said irritably, "Very well, very well; just as you think best"—but added, "Only I

wish to end up by saying quite clearly that I would like the engagement to be a long one, as I mean to go to India and America and shoot lots of tigers and buffaloes before I settle down."

"But, my dear George, if you write too long a letter, you know poor dear Thomas will never read it, never! and we can explain little matters to him so very, very easily afterwards, and make sure he is listening to us. Besides, he will certainly not want you to marry quickly—quite the contrary. As I told you before, he is far, far more likely to refuse his consent to the engagement altogether. So if I were you, George, I should just merely say, 'I know I am a very bad match for your daughter, so it is with the deepest anxiety I await your consent to our engagement.'"

"Very well, very well!" again exclaimed George, but impatiently, for he did not seem happy in his mind.

Clara wondered what was coming next.

"I am grinding awfully hard, Mrs Newsham—awfully! I won't take a half-holiday on Saturday. I shall be grinding all day. So, after all, I am sure I shall never have time to write that letter."

Clara became severely indignant.

"You must write that letter! It never seems to strike you, George, that it is not fair for poor little Adela to be kept any longer in this trying, most trying state of anxious, indeed I may truly say of racking suspense!"

No; it never had struck him Adela was in a state of anxiously racking suspense. However, he answered, but very crossly—

"All right! all right, then! But I tell you plainly, Mrs Newsham, it is a thousand to one I'll forget what to say, and say the wrong thing; and then you'll blow me up afterwards."

"George!"

"Yes, you will," he said, doggedly, for there was an obstinate corner in George; "you'll blow me up afterwards. I tell you I am a shocking bad hand at writing; and I shall have to write that awful essay in the Exam.; and Butt says I must keep my head cool, and not bother about anything; so if you insist on my writing to Mr Newsham, you must write down exactly what I'm to say, and then I'll be certain to say the right thing. I am sure you have a pencil, Mrs Newsham."

But if Clara had had six pencils in her pocket, she was too clever to have found one of them.

"Choose your own words, George—choose your own words," she exclaimed. "All I shall do is merely to tell you the sort of letter I should write if I were you; and, as I said before, I should make it short, and quite to the point, and just simply say you feel it easier to write than to speak on a matter you have warmly at heart; that you wish to propose for Adela, because you are very much in love with her, and think she loves you a little too; then I should merely add, 'I know I am a very bad match for your

daughter, so it is with the deepest anxiety that I await your consent to our engagement.' I should think it quite unnecessary to say anything more. But choose your own words, George—choose your own words. I shall certainly not dictate to you in any way." And Clara, seeing George had found a pencil, very properly left the room.

She started for Eastcourt by the next train.

Thomas hardly realised she was gone, for he was now permanently up in the moon with his dozen drunkards. And interesting companions he seemed to find them. At one moment there would be Thomas's lips moving in earnest speech to them—his head would be shaking, and his whole face looking very grave; while at another he would be smiling at them very, very kindly. And if Adela spoke to him, he would look at her most benignly, with that kind smile still lingering in his glance, but she would feel he did not see her, or see George either. The glassy eyes gazed benevolently over the two young people in Mr Newsham's immediate presence, at those quite pleasant drunkards not so very far beyond. Any amount of flirtation might have gone on beneath them unobserved. But George and Adela really did not flirt at all.

Adela was now quietly, and for the most part silently, content with George. She liked to be silent, for she had very little conversational power. George liked to be silent also, as Adela was difficult to talk to. They had both felt it necessary to converse a

good deal more than they cared for, in Clara's presence. The constant small-talk had been a great effort, especially to George, because it was he who always had to start the topic, as nothing could originate with Adela. But now, at last, George was comfortably at ease. He could hold his tongue when he had nothing to say; and Adela was no longer queer or rude to him, or nervously agitated in her manner. And then, although still under Dr Williams-Smith, she really seemed wonderfully well, not in the least as if she were dying; and her appetite had quite returned.

George had the proposal ready written in his desk, so the anxiety of that literary composition was off his mind. How he did hate writing, to be sure! He would have been a much happier man if pens, ink, and paper had never been invented,—" for then nobody would expect a fellow to write unless he was a monk," he would say. " Deuced difficult to have got me into a monastery. Not in my line, by Jove!"

George had written down exactly what Clara had dictated—suggested, I should have said. He had written down what she had suggested. " She can't blow me up now," he had remarked to himself, when he was directing the envelope to Mr Newsham, " for I've written the very words she used. I can swear to them."

Now that the letter was written, George was getting very anxious to have it unmistakably settled as soon as possible that his engagement was to be a long one. This was the point on which he felt most strongly, for

he had firmly made up his mind not to marry until he had shot the big game. When George knew his own mind clearly, there was no chance of his being weak.

The lover determined to leave his proposal at the Alexandra Hotel early on that Saturday morning. "I can pass there going to Butt's, and I would give the letter into Johnson's own hands."

Johnson was Mr Newsham's confidential butler and valet. A letter given to Johnson was sure to be read by Thomas. In Clara's absence it was also likely to be read by Johnson as well. Metternich was aware of this; but she had no objection to Johnson's knowing that George had proposed for Adela to Mr Newsham at the Alexandra Hotel while she herself was out of town at Eastcourt. Clara never undervalued the importance of servants' gossip.

Johnson's mission in life was to remember what his master forgot. If Thomas had not had an efficient valet, half his letters would have been tossed into the grate unopened by himself; he would never have been dressed like other people; and he might even have taken wine without knowing it when staying away from home. It was part of Johnson's duty to attend on Mr Newsham at table. Johnson was invaluable in this respect, especially at the Palace, as he invariably took care to stop the Bishop's claret just in time.

When George was giving his letter to Johnson, the valet said, "Himportant letter, Mr George?"

"Well . . . yes . . . that is . . . rather important,

Johnson." George said this with a curious sort of embarrassment, instantly noticed by the valet. George had expected no questions.

"I only hask, sir," continued Johnson, confidentially, "because the debate on Mr Newsham's Greater Hextension clause took place last night. I was in the 'Ouse, sir, and heard Mr Newsham's speech. He remembered it quite wonderful, Mr George," and the valet really did seem full of genuine admiration; "quite wonderful! But the 'Ouse was counted hout as the gentlemen were going into the lobby. The final decision on the bill won't take place till Monday. And Mr Newsham he's that hoccupied with the hanxiety! His mind is quite taken hup, sir—quite taken hup, sir. Mr Newsham he wouldn't know, Mr George," and the valet smiled a confidential smile, and dropped his voice—"he would not know if he'd got your letter or not. So with your leave, sir, I'll just keep it by me till Tuesday morning. Wouldn't do to give it to him on Monday night, sir. He'd still be took up with that bill, sir. Let him 'ave a quiet night, Mr George—let him 'ave a quiet night. And I'll give him your letter first thing on Tuesday morning."

George was still in a state of awkward hesitation. Johnson seeing this, cut short all further discussion by saying, "You're thinking the date on your letter won't do, Mr George. But Lor', sir! Lor'! Mr Newsham he never looks at a date. Sometimes hi point it specially hout to him, and so does Mrs Newsham. But Mrs Newsham won't be back here, sir, till the

middle or hend of next week; leastways I heard her tell Mr Newsham twice hover as 'ow Sir Jonathan Johnston wouldn't be wanting to see her before then."

. . . . . .

The coldly unimpressionable woman who lives apart from the emotions of others, will be quite as much agitated by an anxiety touching her own interests and moving to her individual self, as if the heart within her were a warm and not a cold one. It is nearly always a mistake to fancy the contrary; just as it is a mistake to think the anger of hot blood more to be dreaded than the anger of cold.

No woman full of sympathy and warm imagination could have been more moved and angry than Clara when Sunday's post came to Eastcourt and brought her no letter, and Monday's two posts brought none, and Tuesday's came and still there was no letter from Thomas. She knew Adela's perplexed, astounded father would write the moment he got George's proposal. Clara was well aware Thomas had not in the least perceived Adela was grown up, but looked upon her still as a very young child; so the proposal would be a thunderclap sufficiently startling to arouse the puzzled senses which it shook.

"George has dared to disobey me! He has not done what I told him to do."

In order fully to understand the intensity of Clara's wrath at such insubordination, I think you yourself must be a charming woman accustomed for years to the omnipotent arrangement of accidents.

Perhaps it may seem odd that Clara never thought of looking in the newspaper to see if the Dozen Drunkards had come on in the House or not; but the fact is, she had forgotten having regretted so very much that she was unfortunately unable to stay in town just two days longer, when the debate would certainly be over, and when Mr Newsham ought to be told everything. The nicely turned little speech, or rather speeches, being interpreted, had only meant—George, you must not propose for Adela till I am at least two clear days out of the way. I am starting on Wednesday, so propose on Saturday.

The leading idea which has suggested what Clara has said, will remain definitely outlined in her mind; but, like many people who expand their diplomacy in talking according to the passing little instinct of the moment, there will be details on which she may have laid much stress at the time, that she will never think of again. Had Clara only been half as much occupied with Thomas's drunkards as she had pretended to be, she would have been saved severe mental suffering.

But suffering is so often the mother of our greater delight, and we will doubly prize the triumph she has brought forth. On Wednesday morning, when at last, at last! Clara did get exactly the sort of letter from Thomas which best suited her little plans, enclosing George's proposal written in the very words suggested by herself, she was elated by a victory gloriously yet hardly won. Indeed the feeling of elation was nearly

carrying her beyond the prudent caution so necessary in her principal fine art.

Clara has by instinct a very pretty talent for picking nice little fibs out of an inkstand, and rose-coloured ink runs naturally off her facile pen. When she settled George was to propose to Adela's father at the Alexandra Hotel while Adela's mother was away in Nossex, she had foreseen this arrangement would enable her to write a judicious letter to Kate Crofton from Eastcourt. The odious suspicions of that dreadful Sir Cuthbert would be checkmated by a letter from Eastcourt.

In the first moment of pleasant elation, Clara wrote very prettily a charming note to her "dearest Kate," in which she really did wonder if her dearest Kate *could* be half, *half* as surprised as she herself was at George's amazing little letter to Thomas!—"for George has . . . oh, my dear, dear Kate! you will never, never guess what that naughty silly boy has done, never! He has actually proposed for Adela! And poor dear Thomas, he does indeed seem to be in a state of amazed perplexity; and no wonder, no wonder! for George and Adela are quite, quite children still." Clara felt she *must* go up to town *immediately!* though it was so very, very inconvenient for her to do so. She was so very, *very* much wanted at Eastcourt. How she did wish her dearest Kate *could* run away from Crofton Place just for *one* day, and meet her in town! They would then see what they could both do with the two foolish young

people. Unless George and Adela were very, *very* much attached, Clara certainly did think the silly romantic little affair had better come to an end!—though, if George really was, as he himself declared, "very, very much in love," and she should discover Adela's affections were unfortunately engaged, it might not be wise, it might not even be quite, *quite* right, to act *too* precipitately. But till Clara had seen George, and spoken to Adela, how *could* she judge? Kate had *such* influence over her stepson! She was *so* judicious! Clara had the *utmost* confidence in her tact and judgment; and she did think, as Sir Cuthbert was *so* much better of late, she *did* think Kate certainly *might* run up to town if *only* for the day, and talk over this important matter with her and Thomas; and if by *any* chance it would be *impossible* for dearest Kate to leave Crofton Place, could not the Admiral come up for a few hours instead? The dear Admiral had such a *beneficial* influence over George! His advice would be *quite* invaluable! And some one *must* advise Thomas! It was perfectly clear from his letter that poor dear Thomas was *completely* at a loss to know *what* to say. And who could be surprised? for Clara herself felt the responsibility of consenting to permit, or of absolutely refusing to allow, any engagement between the two young people, was really quite, quite *too* great for her. Clara ended by describing the interesting state of agitation into which the news had but too naturally thrown her—"and forgive me, my dearest Kate, if I

have written incoherently. I have only just, *just* received these two letters! and now really I am . . . yes, I *do* think I am even more taken aback than poor, dear Thomas. A daughter's first proposal is always *rather* a shock to a mother! for our children never, never do seem *at all* grown up! and then really it *is* hard to believe Adela is nearly eighteen. Just fancy, my dearest Kate, *eighteen!* And George—how old is George? Older than Adela, I know—wonderful, wonderful! But now I really *must* write to Thomas, so must say good-bye. Pray tell Sir Cuthbert, with my kindest regards, that I am glad to hear he has been feeling so much better and stronger of late; and believe, my dearest Kate, in the affection and sympathy — for I *do* sympathise in the anxiety you will feel about George! just as I *know* you will sympathise in *my* great anxiety about dear little Adela—so believe in the affectionate sympathy of your loving sister"—not even sister-in-law, but—

"loving sister, CLARA NEWSHAM."

Clara wrote off this letter with the greatest ease imaginable. Too great a facility in composition can have its little drawbacks. But Clara was far, far too clever hastily to post the inspiration of the moment, no matter how beautiful it might be. Her wisdom is to be commended; for there are letters like pistols, fired off quickly through an inspiration which may not perhaps outlive the bang. Not that there ever was a bang in Clara's correspondence! Rose-coloured ink

is not gunpowder. Clara's sweet notes were always the quite too more than charming little letters of a quite too more than charming little woman. The danger in her case was, not the tendency to explode, but the risk of appearing just perhaps a little too much of that quite too more than charming woman —so very, *very* innocent, you know!

The early post came to Eastcourt at seven o'clock in the morning. Clara's letter to Kate was written before breakfast. She was much pleased with it at first. It is curious how fondly we will regard what is just warm from our brain; and afterwards be quite surprised we ever liked it!

But even in the first moment of pleased satisfaction, Metternich was true to her clever self, and determined to put her letter aside and think over it till the afternoon. She reflected much upon her written diplomacy. She thought all round her letter, as it were, and in thinking perceived the remote possibility of its being shown by Kate to George. It was really most unlikely this would ever happen, yet not quite improbable.

Until now Clara had thought but little of George. Her inspiration had been to write beautifully for Kate and Sir Cuthbert, particularly Sir Cuthbert.

So Metternich re-read her diplomatic note slowly and carefully. It gave her a pang to think of sacrificing all the nice little innocent astonishment of which the letter was full. It was indeed hard for her to abandon the sweetly pretty character of the ingenuous,

surprised Little Mother. That was the character in which she liked best to appear before the world, for it was her own little ideal of herself, and it is to our ideal self we are ever the most attached.

But Clara was so clever! She read her letter a third and then a fourth time, and judged it quietly in cold blood, as she had done her own conduct once before, with her mind standing dispassionately outside herself, even outside her ideal self. She came to the conclusion that her very surprised Little Mother, so quite too more than innocent, was a piece of poetry not perhaps altogether suited to the intricacies of a complicated fine art.

Yet Clara could not find it in her heart quite to do away with the charming Little Mother; but she obliterated such parts of the ideal as might too easily be destroyed by the sort of accident over which she perceived she could have no control. She still thought that her first instinct was in the main right, so did not go to the trouble of composing a fresh piece of diplomacy, but just merely revised and chastened what she had written a little too charmingly under the first inspiration of pleasant success.

This was the letter Clara finally posted:—

"Eastcourt.

"My dearest Kate,—I *do* think you will be a little surprised by the two letters I am sending you. George has—— Oh! my dear Kate, you will never guess what that boy has done—never! He has pro-

posed for Adela! And poor dear Thomas, he does indeed appear to be in a state of amazed perplexity! I feel that I *must* go up to town *immediately*, though it is so very, *very* inconvenient for me to do so—I am so very, very much wanted at Eastcourt, and find it *so* difficult to leave all the younger girls.

"How I *do* wish, my dearest Kate, *you* could manage to run up from Crofton Place just for *one* day, and meet me in town. We could then talk the whole little matter quietly over with Thomas, and decide what is best for the two young people. As a rule, I am strongly, very strongly against these early engagements; but if George is *really*, as he says, 'very, very much in love' with Adela, and Adela is in love with him, it might not perhaps be wise—it might not even be quite, *quite* right—to act *too* precipitately. Now, my dearest Kate, I have the *utmost* confidence in your tact and judgment, and you are *so* judicious with George, that I *do* think, as Sir Cuthbert is so much better of late, you certainly might leave him for a few *hours!* Though, if by *any* chance this should be quite, *quite* impossible, could not the Admiral come up to town and see us instead? The dear Admiral has *such* a beneficial influence over George, and his advice would be *quite* invaluable. And some one *must* advise Thomas! It is perfectly clear from his letter that poor dear Thomas is *completely* at a loss to know *what* to say, and no wonder; for I am sure I myself feel the responsibility of consenting to permit, or of absolutely refusing to allow, this engagement between

the two young people, as quite, quite *too* great to bear alone!

"And now forgive me, my dearest Kate, if I have written incoherently; but I have only just, *just* received these two letters, and I must confess I am a *little* agitated. I suppose it is always *rather* a shock to a mother to realise that her daughter is quite, quite grown up, for our children never, never do seem *really* grown up. And I *must* say it *is* hard to believe Adela is almost quite eighteen! Just fancy, my dearest Kate, *eighteen!* And George——how old is George? Older than Adela, I know." Clara was anxious to preserve the seeming spontaneity of the letter; so again put, as at first—"Wonderful—wonderful!"

"But I *must* write to Thomas." She had already written that comparatively easy letter, and had with much facility adapted it to the certain perusal of Johnson. "But I *must* write to Thomas, so must really say good-bye! Pray tell Sir Cuthbert, with my kindest regards, that I am truly glad to hear he has been feeling really better and stronger of late; and believe, dearest Kate, in the affection and sympathy—for I *do* sympathise in the anxiety *you* will feel about George, just as I *know* you will sympathise in *my* great anxiety about dear little Adela!—so believe in the affectionate sympathy of your loving sister, CLARA NEWSHAM.

"EASTCOURT, 26*th March*."

She thought it no harm to put "Eastcourt" twice

over; it was such an important part of her diplomacy!

As Clara was folding up George Crofton's letter with Thomas's in her own to Kate, the date of George's short note caught her eye. When she saw "21st March," she knew George had obeyed her "suggestion" exactly, and that Thomas ought to have got the letter on Saturday. In wondering why on earth Thomas had not written before, she remembered his dozen drunkards.

Now it better suited the possible intricacies of the Mother's Fine Art that George's letter should seem to have been written nearly a week after Clara left the Alexandra Hotel, than merely two days. So Metternich was tempted to alter the date. She sat with the letter spread open before her, calmly considering the situation. It would not be easy to change 21 into 25, but very easy to make 21 24. She hesitated.

The temptation was great. But prudence does not yield weakly—it thinks too much. Clara resisted her strong impulse, and did not change 1 into 4, but only dropped a small blot of ink upon the 1, then watched it dry; and it dried into a very satisfactory little accident. As to the scribble above the line, George had scrawled it so illegibly that it really required no alteration at all—not even another small blot.

CHAPTER X.

THERE are houses richly furnished with all that man might ever seem to want, into which the tragic realities of life will force their way like hated bailiffs and take possession. And there are others with such good locks on their park gates, that uninvited guests seem quite shut out, and even death is like a poor relation we sent off to the Colonies when our father died: we comfortably forget him; he is so far away! a mere insignificant undertaker quite occupied in burying uninteresting people at the Antipodes. Just such a pleasant place was Eastcourt! The sterner realities were tramps who as yet had found no entrance there.

Metternich was singularly fortunate in the circumstances of her life; so she could give up her whole mind to her profession.

But her letter, written in luxurious seclusion from the sterner realities of this world, went from her own sunny boudoir at Eastcourt, into the near and terribly real presence of death; for at Crofton Place death

was no poor relation pleasantly settled in the Colonies, but the impatient heir, the rightful master of the estate.

If letters were but living messengers from house to house, what curious changes in the air they would feel in a few short hours! What sudden chills would kill their liveliness! How cruelly small would seem the cleverness which seemed so great!

Clara's letter was brought to Kate in Sir Cuthbert's sick-room. A sort of instinct made Kate thrust it unopened into her pocket. It was not that she in the least guessed the contents, or that in the sorrowful preoccupation of her mind she so much as even remembered Adela. But when we are in grief, there are people whom we instinctively shrink from. We have a feeling that their presence, what they will say, their voice, and even the very letters from their hand, will jar upon us. Yet it is not the rough ones we always dread the most: it is those whose sympathy never feels to us quite real.

Sir Cuthbert had had terrible suffering of late. He was very weak. His nerves were shaken by great pain. And Kate had known him a strong man without a nerve, and to whom all weakness seemed an impossible shame. When he was full of health and strength, and made much of by the greater world as a rising diplomatist of remarkable talent, he never had forgotten to be generous to his brother's widow, and better, to be very kind,—though how many do forget ever to be kind!

The sight of human suffering is strangely moving, perhaps because that gaunt reality is so very real.

Kate, receiving Clara's letter as she did by Sir Cuthbert's bedside, was exactly in the humour when the fine arts are lost upon the mind and realities are most real. There is an art in writing, just as there are such things as grammar and well-turned sentences, and you must be clever to excel in it; yet it is wonderful how little effect you may produce with all your pains! The other way of writing is, I think, wrongly called an art, for it is only the power of real feeling in yourself: if you are really and not falsely glad or sorry, angry or amused, those who read what you have truly written will, without effort on your part, be moved.

Now Clara's Little Mother, so kind and innocent you know! was not a real person; then how could she write like one? She was an artistic creation, clever enough, no doubt, to have produced the desired effect had Kate been in the right humour or the Little Mother come to charm her at almost any other time, for as a rule Kate Crofton was certainly one of the most charitable and least censorious or suspicious of sincerely sweet and rather dull women. It would have been contrary to nature if Thomas's only sister had been particularly brilliant.

So, quite by an unlucky accident, it happened that all Metternich had thought most effective in her diplomatic note, were artistic beauties completely wasted upon her sister-in-law. When Kate read the

letter outside Sir Cuthbert's room, though still within hearing of the sick man's changed voice, she had but one feeling — the strong instinct of its unreality. And at that moment unreality was intensely distasteful to her. There are sugared cakes we can eat at one time, which cloy upon our appetite at another, as if they had sweet poison in them. When Kate came to the words, "as Sir Cuthbert is so much better of late," she stopped reading, then went on again. She stopped a second time at the sentence, "Pray tell Sir Cuthbert, with my kindest regards, that I am truly glad to hear he has been feeling really better and stronger of late." Her two hands, with the letter held tightly between them, dropped down; she raised her head and stood like a person surprised to hear a sound she suddenly remembers to have heard before. In the summer, when Clara had written that very charming letter from Bluehaven, a suspicion, as we know, had rushed into Kate's mind; but Kate had thrust the hated thought aside, and so quickly that she had actually forgotten it. But now the suspicion came upon her again, and this time it was too real to put aside.

"This is untrue. Dr Stumps told Clara poor Cuthbert is dying: he has said he did. So she knows Cuthbert is dying. She does know it!"

When Sir Cuthbert had nicknamed Thomas's white angel "Metternich," Kate had been angry with him, and had thought it a sad pity that hateful diplomacy should have made a really kind-hearted man so satiri-

cal and suspicious. How Kate does detest the whole diplomatic corps! She is one of those good ladies who consider our representatives at foreign Courts should give everybody credit for being actuated by the highest and most disinterested motives.

But now the nickname came back to her mind. She said it to herself—"Metternich! Cuthbert is right. How horrid!" The letter fell from her hands. Merely to touch it hurt her. She was filled with indignation, and something very like hatred rushed into her gentle soul. The shock of believing—she did believe it—that Clara was calmly speculating on the hopeless suffering of the poor sick man close by, made that momentary hatred possible to Kate. It was as if, with her heart full of human feeling for the last terrible reality of life, she had looked up from the slow agony on which her eyes and the pity of her whole soul were bent, suddenly to see the wife of the brother she loved—there was the sting of it—the wife of the brother she loved, standing like a murderess at heart, coldly calculating how long it must take the sick man to die, and coming to the comfortable conclusion it cannot take him long.

I do not say Kate's strong revulsion of feeling against Clara was not exaggerated; I merely tell what she felt. This world is full of calm, pleased gravediggers, most excellent people, highly respectable, with souls like the tearless statues in a cemetery. It is well to learn how to bear with them and not hate them too much, or it may be you will find yourself

hating some admirable person, irreproachable in conduct and discretion, an old friend quite nearly connected with yourself, and much given to accepting your hospitality if your dinners and your company are good.

Kate Crofton generally took some time to answer a note. Her letters were usually affectionate, rather long-winded, quite irreproachable, and certainly dull. There was an amiable indecision about them mildly pleasing to very nice people; yet their kindly vagueness would leave but little distinct impression even on the mind of a quite nice ladylike person. There were minds on which it left none, and Clara's had hitherto been one of these.

But for once in her life Kate felt clearly, strongly, almost passionately, and she wrote quickly as if she had been some other person and not herself. The sick man was lying close by in pain, and she was within hearing of his voice when she wrote:—

"My dear Clara,—I cannot consent to this engagement between George and Adela. George is a penniless boy, and cannot marry unless his uncle dies and leaves him his fortune. Cuthbert is *not* better, as you say he is in your letter. It is not true that he is better. He is much worse. He is in terrible pain, and his present state is very, very sad, for he is extremely weak and low, and sometimes even cries, though he never cried in his life till now, for he was a strong man and most courageous. But he can bear

no agitation now, and Dr Stumps says if we told him anything which moved his feelings or his anger much, it might kill him on the spot.

"If I told him George had proposed for Adela, it would seem to him as if his nephew had settled he is to die, and so felt he could think of marrying quite soon. I am sure my dear George has never, never thought this, but it would look as if he had; and poor Cuthbert has been a kind father to him, when his own father was dead.

"I will not show Cuthbert your letter. I could not show it to him. Nor can I bring myself to tell him of George's proposal, when George has no prospects if poor Cuthbert gets well and lives, as I still pray with all my heart to God he may; because he has been very kind to me, Clara, and to George, and kind when we were in trouble and very poor.

"I cannot go up to town, for Cuthbert is too dangerously ill. But if I ask Uncle Charles, I am sure he will go and see you as you wish, and speak to dear Thomas for me, and to George. I strongly suspect George is not very much in love with Adela, although for the moment he may think he is. I do not consider his letter to Thomas that of a very warm lover, and I am sure George would have written to me and told me of his love before he proposed if he had cared long and much for Adela. I expect the young people have found themselves thrown together, and dear Adela has been looking very pretty some day, and

George has just thought he would propose, as boys often do before they are grown up. I think you will most likely find that Adela, too, hardly knows her own mind. She is so very young! You say you are against these early engagements, but I think I am even more against them than you.

"With my very kindest love to dear Thomas and to Adela, I remain, yours affectionately,

"KATE CROFTON."

In Clara's eyes this letter was unpardonable. The clearness, the decision of it, so different from the amiable ramble of Kate's usual style, felt like insubordination. And insubordination to her will is what a cold determined woman does not easily forgive, and certainly not in that unnecessary sort of person, a husband's sister. Those women of slow circulation, apparently so calmly without strong desire, are the most tenacious of their paramount will. There is no determination like that of some pale fair women: not that strong resolution is in all of them, for some are white doves cooing in weakness. But if determination does mix with a very white cold woman's blood, it is like the worldliness of chilly veins, and becomes the moving power of the whole nature; it should not be fought against with a light heart foolishly, for its very coldness gives it strength, and, if worsted, the resentment of defeat can last for ever.

The curious intensity of silent wrath that ever fills Clara's soul when her firm will meets opposition, was

now deepened by the strong suspicion which forced itself into her mind, that Kate had penetrated the unreality of her letter, and had dared to see through her plots and plans. Charming as Clara undoubtedly can be, she could forgive you for not thinking her the most charming of women with the fairest complexion ever seen. And it is not every charming woman who could do this! But what she never can forgive is that you should think her rather a designing sort of angel, fond of making clever little plans, and not altogether unoccupied by the complications of a difficult fine art. I consider this peculiarity the weak side of Clara's genius. It is mistaken policy not to be courageously yourself, especially if you intend to work on a grand scale. I have known quite wonderfully plotting ladies who have carried the art of matchmaking to a magnificent height, and who yet have not been unpopular, for they gave themselves out boldly as women of the world, and people were forearmed and never felt deceived. Lady Harchester is one of these: her genius, so inferior to Clara's in imagination and the power entirely to invent, is superior in courageous common-sense. I do not think the Countess of Harchester is cordially disliked by anybody except Clara. Clara, it is true, is her sincere though silent enemy—but not because she sees through Lady Harchester's arrangement of accidents: it is because Lady Harchester has seen through hers.

I am sorry Metternich's mind should have this weakness, for it is a weakness to resent the fact that

the whole world is not born blind. Clara having a blind husband, as many a dear ingenuous creature has, thought every one should be like Thomas. When I have read of the blind people who of old received their sight, and have followed them back in my imagination to their dwelling-place, I have wondered once or twice if all their relations were glad to see them. I have doubted it; for I have felt sure there would be at least one quite charming woman who would be very angry that long blindness had ended in clear sight. Then, certainly, I was only thinking of the Israelites and Jews!

Clara had hitherto looked upon Kate as a poor sort of creature,—just the kind of uninteresting thing you might expect Thomas's sister to be! She made use of her when convenient, and did not dislike her because she was so comfortably blind. It was Clara herself, with her own hand, who had opened Kate's eyes: then, I ask, what right had she,—she of all people,—to be angry if blindness through her own act was forced to see? And, after all, it was only what was as clear as day that Kate did dare to see. In this matter I have no sympathy whatever with Clara: she was unjust, and was not even clever.

There was, however, one sentence in Kate's unpardonable letter which Clara approved of. It was the one promising that "Uncle Charles" should come up to town. An interview with the Admiral was what best suited Metternich, and what she had calculated on from the first: never for a moment had she ex-

pected Kate could leave Sir Cuthbert, for she knew him to be really dying.

Kate gave Clara's letter to the Admiral. The artistic diplomacy was by no means lost on him. The dear, ingenuous Little Mother produced exactly the desired effect.

"I don't wonder, Kate, your charming sister-in-law is in a state of bewildered surprise. Never was so amazed in my whole life, never! The idea of George writing to Thomas that he is very, very much in love with Adela! In love? Fiddlestick! Why, when he was at Bluehaven, I rated him soundly for being rude to the child. Remember doing so perfectly, perfectly! Lord bless my soul! the boy must have gone wrong in his head through all this newfangled cramming! Turns many a fine young fellow's brain! Poor Mrs Newsham! I can entirely enter into her feelings; and she must naturally be so much against this match, for her daughter might marry any one. Adela is as pretty a little creature as you'd see anywhere, and has quite the beautiful complexion of her mother. I have been all over the world, and I must say, Kate, I have never seen a complexion to be compared for marble whiteness to Mrs Newsham's; and yet there never was a charming woman so unconscious of her beauty and her charm as she is! And I always admire her unworldliness, Kate. I think her a very unworldly person indeed. To be sure she is against this match! to be sure she is! and quite right too! And still, you see, strongly as she

disapproves of these early engagements, she actually says—— Now, where is it? Ah! here!" and the Admiral read aloud from Clara's letter: "'But if George is really, as he says in his letter to Thomas, very, very much in love with Adela, and Adela is in love with him, it might not perhaps be wise, it might not even be quite, quite right' — how I wish all ladies thought as much of right and wrong as Mrs Newsham!" — and Admiral Crofton re-read admiringly the words, "'it might not even be quite, quite right to act *too* precipitately.' Now, can anything be kinder than this? Why, half the mothers would have turned a young fellow like George straight out of doors, and never have let him put his foot inside their house again. Silly, penniless lad! Most likely doesn't know his own mind! and has not got a prospect on earth but the certainty, if his head is a little touched, of being plucked in his examination."

Kate had allowed the Admiral to talk on without interruption. She was sorry when he stopped, for she hated saying what for George's protection she felt it her duty to say. Kate was of a generous nature. She liked the sort of mind which can think no evil. It was very painful to her to see clearly with wide-open eyes; for it is a great mistake to suppose, as some do, there is any pleasure in seeing people are not what they pretend to be. The pleasure is when you can believe with all your mind and heart. Those to whom disillusion is anything but sorrow are few indeed. Disillusion I believe to be the great grief of life.

Kate was a timid woman. At all times she disliked saying an unpleasant thing. She hated it now, and turned away her head like a shy child when she began to speak. "Uncle Charles," she said, "if Cuthbert dies, George would be his natural heir." Then she suddenly turned round and looked straight at the Admiral, and said, with the courage of indignation, "Dr Stumps told Clara that Cuthbert is dying."

"And far too clever a woman she is to believe him!" exclaimed the Admiral hotly, with an indignation quite equal in its way to Kate's. "Mrs Newsham is far too clever a woman," he repeated, "to believe a word Stumps says. Stumps has quite got round you, Kate. Wonder you have any faith in him! Wrong-headed humbug, like all the rest of them! Why, Mrs Newsham would as soon believe Stumps as she would that conceited fellow who had the impudence to charge a hundred and fifty guineas for his railway ticket from London and back. Specialist indeed! Special peculiarity of only agreeing with himself. Still, wouldn't tie himself to any clear opinion, and declined to discuss the case with those who knew a great deal more about it than he did." That meant, with the Admiral himself. "Never met one of your dosers yet," he exclaimed, "who was anything but a quack! Cuthbert is no more dying than I am. He is just going through a crisis. I have been expecting his crisis all along, and if properly treated, he would get through it in no time, and be all the better afterwards. Why, when I had my

severe crisis off Vera Cruz, I was frightfully low at the time, but picked up finely afterwards, and felt better than I had done for six weeks before."

Now the Admiral did not know it, for he knew nothing about himself or his feelings, but it was really the great love he bore his nephew which made him so wrong-headed. He was one of those kind-hearted and curiously constituted people who never seem able to believe in the possible death of any one they love till the corpse is in its coffin. "The dosers know they can humbug you, Kate," he said, "but catch them spinning any of their yarns to me!"

An instinct of the real feeling which made the Admiral so testy, prevented Kate from arguing with him.

I wonder if the innocent ba-lamb, to whom I have already likened Admiral Crofton, is really just a little more cunning than it looks? Because, guileless as the dear Admiral certainly is, he was on this occasion one little bit more acute than he had seemed; for he had not been quite insensible to the real meaning of Kate's words, though I do not say he had grasped it fully. If you avoid the knife you are not actually cut. He had winced from an innuendo which was like high treason to him, as he loyally believed in the most charming of charming women, and liked to believe in her with all his soul. It is true he had heard Sir Cuthbert joke about "Metternich," but he thought the joke in very bad taste, and it had produced no effect upon him; for there is no sting where there seems to be no truth. "Metternich" was an unsuitable,

disagreeable nickname, the direct result of diplomatic depravity on his sick nephew's mind; for the Admiral's feeling towards diplomacy and diplomatists was exactly like Kate's. He considered "Metternich" as pointless as he would the Great Napoleon, or Genghiz Khan, or the Wily Serpent of the Sioux. Where the Admiral had faith, he could believe through thick and thin. He believed quite beautifully in the ingenuous, agitated, surprised Little Mother, and had more real faith in the actual existence of Clara's ideal than Clara herself.

His faith was visible, and if Kate had been clever she would have seen it; but she was very blind. When a truly charitable creature like Kate has thought and said an unkind thing, her own daring seems to her outrageous. For the first time in her life she had openly imputed what she considered the vilest of vile motives to another, and that other Thomas's wife. Then, in all generous natures there is a strong dislike to strike a second time when you have just struck hard. Kate felt as if she had said enough, more than enough. Uncle Charles had let the imputation pass without comment,—"for naturally," thought she, "he would not care to discuss so delicate a matter any more than I should." So as he did not contradict her, she took it for granted he thought like her. Many people do this, and it is so often a mistake.

Kate found the Admiral very sensible in his views of matrimony—more sensible than she had expected,

for he was of a highly romantic turn. But he was perfectly convinced the young people could not possibly know their own minds. "Saw them at Bluehaven, Kate. Know all about their feelings! No danger of breaking anybody's heart in this affair—none whatever! and that's always a comfort. It enables one to put an end to the whole affair with a firm hand and an easy conscience."

So the Admiral entirely agreed with Kate that an engagement was completely out of the question: it was settled he should say this very clearly to Thomas and to George. "But as to Mrs Newsham," he exclaimed, "I am quite sure she will say it to me."

"Yet say it to her, Uncle Charles," replied Kate, rather timidly, "say it to her all the same, and—quite clearly." Kate then felt she had indeed put the Admiral well on his guard, and that George's interests were safe in his hands; for had she not opened his eyes to the worst possible view of Clara's character and letter?

I doubt if the most depraved of diplomatists would ever have called Kate Crofton "Metternich."

The Admiral was quite right about Clara. The very first words she said to him were, "My dear Admiral, there can be no engagement between the two foolish young people! There can be none! Now, my dear Admiral, my dear Admiral, I know you are so very, very romantic! but you and I *must* have some common-sense. Now positively we must! It is so very, very unfortunate Thomas should have

had to go down to Eastcourt to speak at a temperance meeting in Slumby on the *very* day you have come up to town! And there is George still in for his examination! and dear little Adela laid up with a cold on her chest! Oh! it is nothing really serious, my dear Admiral, only Dr Williams-Smith is so very, very careful! But, my dear Admiral, my dear Admiral, I know your opinion of the faculty!"

Mrs Newsham was quite charming! She had never been more charming, the Admiral thought. He felt he could almost believe in the "dosers" if she believed in them too; but as he had told Kate, Mrs Newsham was far, far too clever to believe in any one of them. He found, as he had expected, that she had no faith whatever in Dr Stumps; and he only wished Kate could have heard how entirely she disagreed with the Shropwich doctor's bad opinion of Cuthbert's state, and how completely she agreed with the very hopeful view he himself took of the case. Mrs Newsham seemed perfectly certain Sir Cuthbert would recover, and rapidly, as the "crisis" must soon be over.

And Mrs Newsham was as sensible as she was charming! The only point on which she did not perhaps quite, quite agree with the Admiral, was in thinking the two foolish young people—"Ah! my dear Admiral, such very, *very* foolish young people!"—were just a little more in love than he suspected. Clara gave the prettiest possible little reasons for this, and they were little reasons not unmoving to the Admiral's tender soul.

"Now, my dear Admiral," she said — "my dear Admiral . . ."

But no! I cannot do justice to her genius! In this *tête-à-tête* with Admiral Crofton, Clara rose to a height where I cannot follow her: besides, the beauty of her complexion and the charm of her manner cannot be felt through pen and ink, as they undoubtedly were felt by the Admiral. So I only dare to say that on this occasion Metternich was admirable! She was truly admirable!

. . . . . .

When you intend to disagree with a person, begin by entirely agreeing with him. This was the principle on which Clara had for years practised her Medical Fine Art. We know it was by entirely agreeing with Dr Fozzle that she had got him to disagree with himself and order the Bishop to Bluehaven; and in those sweet little purrings she and old Doseman would have together, Clara would begin by so completely, so completely agreeing with the doctor, that, as we are all aware, old Doseman would end by saying, *of his own accord*, exactly what Clara wanted him to say.

Now in that interview with Admiral Crofton, when Metternich's genius rose to such a remarkable height, it was not merely upon the principles of her Mother's Fine Art that she founded her brilliant diplomacy: she made use of all her arts, of all and every one! And not one of them was lost upon her dear, dear Admiral! Clara's old fondness for that guileless man

had more than revived. I think she never was quite so fond of him before. The artist loves surpassingly the work on which every touch of his has told. It is the sense of power he loves,—that feeling of real mastery which is the satisfaction given to genius, and to genius alone.

The fashion is always to speak of genius as "transcendent," as if it were some far-off idol, very distant from our natural selves; a golden jewelled image on a pedestal, and no living, simple, very human thing. Now I do not think real genius ever makes upon us the impression of being clever at all, but seems something so easy in its ways, so natural, so sympathetically human, that we feel one with it — as if its pleasant ease were ours, and we were moved like it. Corregio's "Io anche son pittore!" was the perfect expression of the effect of genius on a soul which could feel what genius is.

Clara made no impression of cleverness upon the Admiral's mind. When quite naturally, *of his own accord*, just as if he had been a doctor, he came round gently, imperceptibly from his first conviction that there could be no engagement between the two young people, to the idea that it might not perhaps be quite, *quite* right to act *too* precipitately in this matter, and that after all it *might* be better to consent to a sort of indefinite engagement which would enable the two foolish young people to see quite unconstrainedly a little more of each other, and so quite, quite clearly to know their own minds, and to feel what very, very foolish

young people they really were, and so finally to consent of their own free will to a complete rupture of the whole silly affair,—the Admiral was not even aware he was agreeing with Metternich: he felt as if he were simply agreeing with himself, and saw clearly with his own eyes that, *under the circumstances*, this certainly was the best possible arrangement. It was the "circumstances" which made the arrangement so wise, because he had become convinced there was just enough love between the two very foolish young people to make violent opposition undesirable. Violent opposition turns the short-lived, childish love into the great life-enduring passion. Admiral Crofton came to the conclusion that if George and Adela saw a little more of each other in a perfectly natural, unconstrained way, the youthful illusion would very, *very* soon quite, *quite* melt away! And he again felt as if he were merely agreeing with himself. Such is the power of genius!

The Admiral had intended writing immediately to tell Kate what he in his own mind thought best and wisest for the two young people; but he had agreed with himself—and with Metternich too—that as even an indefinite engagement could not be allowed without Thomas's consent, he would not after all write his letter from the Alexandra Hotel, but would wait until he had spoken to Thomas, and then write from Eastcourt. "Thomas's consent" seemed a very important part of the matter to the Admiral, for he had not the remotest suspicion that Mr Newsham did not

rule his own household, just as he himself would rule his own ship.

The Admiralty is not invariably wise, but it is wise indeed in discouraging commanders, captains, and dear admirals from sailing with a charming woman at their helm.

George's examination finished on the evening of the same day that Admiral Crofton and Mrs Newsham had their memorable interview at the Alexandra Hotel.

The next morning Metternich and her dear, dear Admiral, and George and Adela—those very foolish young people!—all went down together to Eastcourt to consult or to be consulted about, with that man of clear perception and iron will, the excellent Thomas.

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